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Vol. 14

TWICE-A-MONTH

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JAN. 1 1910

The Popular Magazine

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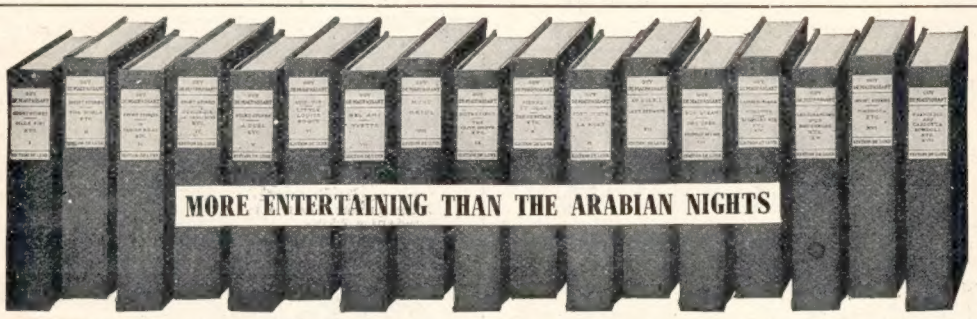

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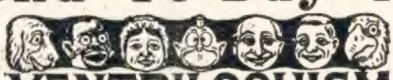

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VOLUME XIV NUMBER 6

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

JANUARY 1, 1910

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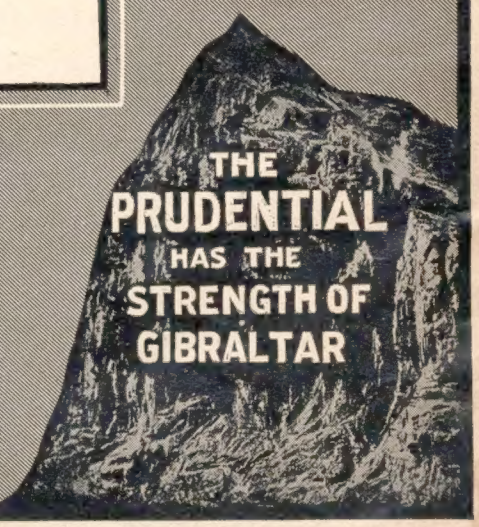

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XIV. JANUARY 1, 1910. No. 6.

The Dry Ridge Gang

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Lure of the Dim Trails," "The Long Shadow," Etc.

The old West—the West of stage hold-ups and mining-camp broils—has passed away; and in its place there exists a new West, which the desperado of forty years ago would hardly recognize. Violence and fantastic bravado are no longer in keeping with the local color, it would seem. Yet occasionally there is a reversion to the manners of the old days; sometimes a lone bandit holds up a train and succeeds in making his getaway. Here is a story of a gang which operated with success in an enterprising section of the modern West. You will find it as good a tale as was ever written around the lawlessness of the West that has ceased to be.

CHAPTER I.

BIG BEND RANCH.

RAY'S enthusiastic monologue lasted until we swung down the steps of the Pullman at Porcupine. From all he said, I fully expected to see "deer sign" in the main thoroughfare of the place, and perhaps even a buffalo or two, which had escaped the grand slaughter when the land began first to feel the tightening rein of the white man's driving. But you never can place much dependence upon the picture another man gives you of a place as yet unseen; and when Ray's father drove up to the red-and-green depot with a shiny sorrel team and a surrey of the latest pattern, I couldn't help turning to grin derision at Ray.

"We have this sort of wilderness east of the Mississippi," I flung at him, as he shot by me.

He didn't even look around, so intent was he upon greeting the big, placid-faced man in the light-gray clothes and panama hat.

"Hello, dad!" he was shouting across the platform. "Here we are—and here you are, not a minute too early or too late—just exactly on time, as usual. Come on, Walter! I want you to meet dad. Hurry up, man!"

I was hurrying, but I was not running; it was not *my* dad waiting to get me by the hand, and I couldn't see the sense of sprinting to the rig at the risk of knocking down women and children, of whom there were half a dozen or so coming along the platform. When I reached Ray, he had a foot on the hub of the front wheel, a hand on the gray-clad knee of his father, and he was talking about two hundred words to the minute, and had forgotten me and his haste to get me there.

A shiny-hatted old gentleman, with a comfortably dignified bulge to his white waistcoat, came nipping along at my

elbow. He lifted the shiny hat, and said: "How d' do, Sheriff Wellcome?" in that punctilious way which betrays reverence for titles and such. I stood back, while he shook hands with Ray, and inquired after his health, and his mother's health, and his sister's health —and the health of all his cousins and his aunts, I began to fear. But the sheriff, his eyes twinkling humorously at me over the man's head, stopped the catechism by reaching out with his whip and flicking me lightly upon the shoulder.

"Come up here in the seat with me, young man," he commanded, in a particularly friendly fashion. "I've heard about yuh—and, as far as I'm concerned, I don't want any introduction. I know who you are, and you know who I am, and so we'll cut out the red tape. See yuh later, judge. I promised to have these young cubs at the ranch in half an hour after the train pulled in. I've got just twenty-five minutes, now, to do it in—and I'll bet the limit my women are holding the watch on me, to see if I make good. Get in behind, Ray—I'll send a man in after the plunder. So-long, judge."

The judge stood aside quite hastily, to save getting his white front scraped by the hind wheel of the surrey, and lifted his hat again.

We turned—on one wheel, it seemed to me—and went careening down a side street, and out upon a prairie road —trail, I learned afterward to call it.

I don't remember that any one spoke during the first ten minutes or so. Ray's father gave his attention to the horses —and they needed it, if I was any judge. They seemed inclined to bolt, and I was glad he was so big and seemed to know so well how to hold them in. I wasn't much accustomed to horses, then; but when I saw that they were not going to do anything except just what he wanted them to do, I settled back, and took the opportunity to look him over more particularly.

Sheriff Wellcome—he had been sheriff of that county for years, Ray told me—was a big man, as I have said before. I don't mean fat, exactly, or tall; yet he was both. He must have been at least two or three inches over six feet, and I'm sure he weighed more than two hundred pounds. His face was smooth-shaven and smiling, the smile seeming to come from within and to shine in his eyes, even when his lips were drawn firm. They were blue, those eyes—the friendly sort of blue which gives one confidence, with a tinge of hazel next the pupil. I'm going into detail because he was the first member of Ray's family whom I met, and because the man himself interested me immensely. I pictured him doing big things, and doing them easily, without any fuss or flurry. I thought, then, that his friendship would be worth trying for, but that I should not relish being a fugitive from the law and having him on my trail; I should feel uncomfortably certain of being caught.

He turned suddenly, and gave me one keen look which, I felt, measured me mentally, morally, and physically; and then turned his head so that he could see Ray behind me. "Those the latest collars?" he asked, with some amusement. "And are yuh heeled with the implements for amusing yourselves as you've been used to doing in college? Got a football, I'll bet, and a boxing outfit, and a punching bag, and such toys, packed away in your trunks."

"Not much. We're going to hunt, and fish, and be appointed deputies under you, dad, and help chase outlaws. We're hoping you've got a good supply on hand—Walter's hungry for a man hunt." Ray always took a crack at me if he got the chance. In reality, I am, and always have been, the most peace-loving of mortals, and would much rather wade in a good trout stream than in gore.

"Oh, all right," said his father, and chuckled. "I guess I can furnish the game. There's the Dry Ridge gang yuh might run down, just to pass the time. They'll stand a lot uh hunting before they get what you could call tame."

I think I must have looked almost as skeptical as I felt, because he laughed outright. "Oh, it's straight

goods," he assured me. "There *is* a Dry Ridge gang, and they're some wild. They robbed a bank here—the Citizen's State Bank, you know, Ray—a couple of weeks ago. I was up the line, at the time. Just got in yesterday from a four-day hunt for them."

"Couldn't you get any clue?" I asked politely.

He laughed again. "Well, m' son, I wasn't out hunting clues; it was the men that turned the trick I was after. I didn't get 'em—no. Nor any sign of 'em, beyond the Dry Ridge. I'll bet I've followed that bunch forty times to Dry Ridge—and lost 'em there—one time and another. If it's hunting bold, bad men yuh want, go to it."

Ray made a good many rash assertions and large promises, at all of which his father laughed indulgently. So, we arrived at the place they called the Big Bend ranch, and there was a good deal of embracing and incoherent talk. For, when an only son comes home from his last year at school, and meets his mother and the only sister he has to his name, there is bound to be a season of hysteria before a mere friend of said son can hope to receive any notice whatever.

They were nice to me, though, once they let go of Ray and remembered that I was present. I liked the mother very much, because she reminded me of a chirrupy little Jenny Wren; and I knew instinctively that she was going to take me right into the nest, and make me feel as if I really and truly belonged there.

The girl—Ray called her Ellie, a name which it took me some time to realize was not meant for Ella, but Ellison, shortened conveniently—was not like either father or mother; and I decided that she was worth studying. She wasn't a beauty, strictly speaking; yet there was something about her which made you think of her. If she spoke, you were bound to listen; and if she did not speak, you immediately became curious to know what she was thinking. It seemed to me that rebellion lurked always in her eyes; but her manner was serene, and her face untroubled, and I could detect no characteristics of the Western girl, except a few phrases and colloquialisms not common east of the big river.

She did not pay much attention to me after the first handshake and a few friendly sentences. She was plainly absorbed in Ray, and his new clothes, and the way he knotted his tie and dented his hat; and even the new cut of his shoes came in for her keen-eyed criticism. Ray *was* a bit extreme—the college youth as he is painted on the stage and in magazine illustrations. Why, he even carried a stick, though there was no earthly reason for it—it was not even a new fad. He wore light gray a good deal, and silk socks that gave a touch of bright color below, and ties which carried the same hue higher. He smoked a meerschaum so big and heavy that it was wearing the enamel off his teeth at a rate which would have sent me, scared, to my dentist; and because he had the true magazine-picture profile, he was always turning it toward you, with his hat tilted, to give a glimpse of the lock of hair which he kept draped carelessly down over one eyebrow.

All this doesn't mean that I disliked Ray. He was the biggest-hearted, best fellow I ever knew; and his little vanities I took as a matter of course. Even he did not take them seriously.

"The girls like this sort of thing, Walter," he used to defend himself. "And I like the girls. See?"

I saw, and there you have Ray.

Mrs. Wellcome, I saw at once, was pathetically proud of him. Ellie was likewise sensible of his good looks, and his broad shoulders, and all his pleasing personality; but, as I have said, there was something in her eyes which did not quite match the rest of her, and I felt myself treading cautiously when I talked with her.

For the rest, I spent the evening in unpacking my two trunks, and spreading myself and my belongings over the big room which was to be my abiding place for three months—I had definitely promised Ray that long a visit, and after that no man could tell what might

befall. There were two windows looking toward Porcupine, and I could see the trail, winding like a brown ribbon thrown carelessly over the low hills. Five miles, they told me, it was to town; but the clear air belied the distance, and at dark, when the electric lights flashed out all over town, I felt that I was in the very outskirts. It was not such a primitive little place, either. There were trolley lines running here and there—and three ten-twenty-thirty theatres, Ray admitted reluctantly, when I went after him about misleading me. He had rather harped upon how wild it was, and how different from the East, and what adventures we were sure to have, and all that rot.

"It *is* wild," he reiterated, at bedtime, roosting upon a corner of my dresser, and holding up that infernal pipe so that he could talk. "Don't make the mistake of thinking that two trolleys spell civilization. The town's a town, I admit. You can buy any kind of booze, from absinthe to ice-cream soda. But in an hour you can gallop straight into the real West—the West of the shoot-as-you-ride bad man. We've got a telephone and acetylene gas in the house—and in the corrals are horses it takes a real broncho fighter to ride. I can take you back here into Big Bend and give you a crack at deer, and wolves, and wildcats—and I can show you fellows who wear hairy chaps for use, and not for looks, and handle a branding iron as naturally as you do a fountain pen."

I like Ray when he grows heated and eloquent; and he looked very handsome and earnest, perched there, swinging his lavender-socked foot, and holding up a pound or so of warm meerschaum, the while he scowled at me under the lock of hair on his forehead. I shook out a pair of pajamas, and smiled in a way to set him going again.

"Why, blame you, I'll take dad up on that Dry Ridge gang, and haul you out hunting real, dyed-in-the-wool outlaws——"

"Not all the citizens of New York or Boston are law-abiding," I hinted maliciously. "No doubt, one might go into the slums and find thieves quite as desperate and hard to catch——"

"By thunder, I'll show you, before the summer's gone!" growled Ray, and took his indignation, and his pipe, and his lavender socks out of my sight.

CHAPTER II.

A BIT OF HUMAN DYNAMITE.

Usually I count upon a week for adjusting myself to new people and a new locality, but within two days I forgot that I was a stranger to the land. Not that anything happened, exciting or otherwise; I only took a ride or two with Ray, and incidentally saw why the place was called Big Bend.

Wellcome, it seemed, owned a very large tract of land, almost surrounded by the Missouri River. It ran back from the home place for miles—a wild-looking area, consisting of white sand dunes, which shifted always eerily and never looked twice the same, so that one might very easily lose his way, if he got out among them and away from the river; and wooded hollows, where you fancied you heard wild things rustling the bushes behind you; and deep gashes, rock-rimmed and hard to cross—a barren land, it seemed to me, where the cattle tossed horns and tails, and scampered off, with a great crackling of branches, when you rode near. In the grassy places you found them, mostly; out on the sand dunes, the tracks were mainly those of wolves, and rabbits, and the like.

I let Ray lead me around for two hours and more; and then I told him plainly that I hated the place, and that I would thank him kindly if he would show me the way out. Which he did, after a harrowing season of riding to the hilltops and looking this way and that, and knitting his eyebrows. He would not own that he was lost, but he looked vastly relieved when at last we came to a grassy knoll and saw a gate at the top.

That was the Big Bend. Six or eight miles, it must have been, to the

end of the loop—probably farther. The river, as it swung around, was wide, and deep, and hungry-looking; and the opposite shore was all steep bluffs and rock-rimmed ledges, where the soil was a dull red or duller yellow, and the rocks themselves looked old, and worn, and blackened by the weather.

Ray, when we stopped at the gate, showed me Dry Ridge, away across the river to the south. He said we would ride over there, some day, and take a look at it. And, while I was not at all curious or eager for a closer view, I knew better than to let Ray see any lack of enthusiasm. Farther on, we climbed a hill; and I had a fine view of the whole country, from Porcupine to the Rocky Mountains, miles away. I saw how the great loop of the river narrowed at the open end, until the Wellcome ranch—I mean the place where they lived, and not all the land they owned—quite filled it. Three or four miles away, I saw another ranch, and asked Ray whose it was.

"Oh, by George! There's a mighty nice girl there—or used to be. Named Mollie—or Mabel—or something like that. Has black eyes and a kissy mouth—used to be chummy with sis, you know. We'll ride over there to-morrow, Walter. You like black eyes and kissy mouths, as I happen to know."

He didn't know anything of the sort, and he was speaking for himself; but that was merely another way he had, and I let it go as not worth an argument.

I really don't mean to go into tiresome details regarding my first days and my first impressions. Enough happened afterward—and beginnings are seldom exciting.

I rode over to the ranch with Ray on the morrow, and I was introduced to the girl with the black eyes and the kissy mouth. Her name, it transpired, was neither Mollie nor Mabel, but Florence; and her memory of Ray seemed eloquently clear. I'll venture she had no difficulty in naming him correctly; and the look in her eyes, when she greeted him, stirred me to something very near pity. Ray was a good fellow; but he was yet in the cub stage, and not to be depended upon, except as his moods and impulses harmonized with one's desires. He had gone away, and nearly forgotten—and she had stayed at home and remembered. It was not a new situation, by any means; and I hoped, in a kindly way, that it would not be repeated, though, from the way he swung back to the old footing and quite monopolized the girl—as was his way, if the girl were young and good-looking—boded ill for her peace of mind, unless she had gleaned wisdom during his absence. Ray never meant harm toward any living soul; but the ill we do to others recks little of our intentions, I have noticed.

Her father and brothers were at home; and while Ray talked with her, I struck up a desultory conversation with the three men. Fred and Steve they called the two brothers; and I afterward heard men speak of the father as old Jack Johnson. They owned a horse ranch, and seemed fairly prosperous, and more enlightened than the general run of farmers—or ranchers, I should say.

I took quite a fancy to Steve—perhaps because he proved to be an enthusiastic fisherman, and offered to take me back in the hills, across the river, to a good trout stream. I had been secretly afraid that I should miss that sport; for the country, as I had seen it, looked quite barren of water, except for the Missouri—and river fishing I never cared for.

When we started home, my mind was wholly given to my fly book, and to gurgly mountain streams, and the singing of my reel when an eighteen-inch trout fought to free himself. Ray was chattering; but I did not hear a quarter of what he was saying, I'm afraid. I had come West with him almost wholly for sake of the fishing and hunting, and I had imagined that I could walk out at sunrise and catch a basket of trout for breakfast; whereas Ray's father had told me carelessly that he believed there were trout "up in the hills," and pointed to a hazy

ridge which, even to my unaccustomed eyes, looked dishearteningly distant. So, you will see why I was full of gratitude and friendship toward the man who volunteered to lead me to good fishing.

Near the ranch, we overtook Ellie, riding slowly with a very good-looking young man—Dade McArthur, as he was introduced to me. He didn't look as if we were particularly welcome, and I was for riding on. But Ray somehow got the fellow behind, and kept him talking in the low tone of private converse; so that Ellie spurred ahead and came alongside.

"From your face, you are meditating matters of great portent to the human race," she said, looking at me with that strange gleam in her eyes. "Might a mere woman——"

"Surely," I answered her. "I am thinking of those blue hills, and of what they are hiding. Of——"

"Oh, you mean the Dry Ridge gang?" She peered into my face.

There it was again! *I* didn't want anything of the Dry Ridge gang, except to be left alone by them; and yet they kept thrusting themselves upon my notice, out of season. I'm afraid I rather stared back at her.

"Strange as it may sound, I was not. I was thinking of so frivolous a matter as wading thigh deep in a trout stream. This gang—er—it seems to be the great issue, out here. May I ask what they have done so fierce, that every one is——"

"What haven't they done, you mean. They haven't been caught, for one thing."

I took a moment to study her reply. "Do you admire them for that?" I demanded.

"I do. I admire them immensely. They have the whole country against them, and their lives are the forfeit they must pay for a blunder. But they never do blunder! They do the most daring things—I could love a man like that!"

From the color in her cheeks, from the light that danced in her eyes, I knew that she meant what she said.

"Would you like to be a lady bandit?" I asked her, after a pause.

The defiance that smouldered always in her eyes flared into a flame. "Yes, I would. If I were a man, and father had kept me like—like this, I should have joined the Dry Ridge gang long ago! At least, they *do* something. They don't just eat, and sleep, and wear decent clothes, and do exactly as sixty million other people are doing in the country. They have the courage—the initiative—to get out and *live*."

I felt that I was learning much, these last few minutes; and I glanced over my shoulder, to make sure that we were not being overtaken by the commonplace.

"Do you call it living to—to rob banks and such?"

"I call anything living that takes brains, and courage, and dynamic energy—anything but this three-meal-a-day plodding from sun to sun, doing nothing that hasn't been done millions of times before—nothing except what will be done millions of times again. I don't particularly care for stealing and shooting people. But I would do that, if I were a man, before I would do nothing."

Of a sudden, in my zeal to turn the subject into a joke—for I felt uncomfortably sure that she was in deadly earnest—I did a foolish thing.

"Would you call it living to run down the Dry Ridge gang and, by your superior wit and—er—dynamic energy, bring them to justice?"

I glanced at her sidelong, and saw how she caught her breath at the notion. She rode quietly, staring straight ahead at the trail.

"As for bringing them to justice, I don't know about that," she began slowly. "It's only a name we set up to worship, this justice. But to bring them to bow to the will of the stronger—yes, that would be living, too. That would be worth while—more worth while than to befuddle the fools whom they rob. We should have to match our wits against the wits of our equals—and, if we won, think how we should have to work for it!"

I saw that I had not lightened the subject to a joke, and I tried again. "Do you know, I'm coming to believe you a very revolutionary young woman." I smiled at her.

She faced me steadily. "If you had the leisure and the brains to think out this riddle of life for yourself, instead of sitting down, with your eyes shut, and swallowing the solution which other men give you, you might be a bit revolutionary, yourself," she told me bluntly. "Father, perhaps you have heard, would never let me go away to school. Beyond high school, he would not hear of it. He said that it was money wasted, educating girls. He said a man may spend hundreds of dollars stuffing their brains with learning, and, in the end, the girls married —and that settles it.

"He said if I were deformed or disfigured, so that no man would ever want me, I might go to school all my life, for all of him. But, seeing I am —what I am, he would never waste money educating me. That's why I have always been at home. Ray has gone to college, and brought home—a fine assortment of silk socks! I have stopped at home, and thought out the riddle, and become a revolutionary young woman. Sometimes I think father would have done better to let me stuff my brain with geometry, and the like. I feel sometimes"—she stopped, and looked at me with a certain wistfulness—"kind sir, you see before you a stick of dynamite, wanting only a light to the fuse to go off and blow up the whole set scheme of her life!"

So that was what I had seen in her eyes, from the first! I laughed uneasily; for I was not accustomed to these dynamic young women, and was quite at a loss how to meet her confidence. Why she had spoken so frankly to me I did not know, but I felt that she was not in the habit of putting this side of herself into speech. My strongest thought crystallized into words.

"With your father sheriff of the county, and anxious to catch these admirable bandits, I wonder what he would say if he knew how they excite the envy of his daughter?"

She laughed shortly. "My father is sheriff of the county. He is a hunter of men, but he is not quick at reading the thoughts of his women. If he had been——"

I feared she was going to say something unfilial; but she stopped just short, and laughed again. "Father is a dear, in many ways; but he is about two hundred years behind the times, where women are concerned. It would be all right, I suppose, except that I inherited more of his qualities than mother's. He can't understand that a woman may want something beyond a home and pretty clothes and a husband. He regards women lecturers and all business women as freaks, with something gone from their femininity. And he is a perfect rock where his convictions are concerned. Only one human being has power to move him, and that is——"

"Your mother?" I prompted, when she paused.

She tilted her head backward toward those who rode behind. "Ray. He worships him. His adoration is quite as complete as mother's—and more pathetic, because he's a man and undemonstrative, and because Ray doesn't realize it and doesn't return good measure. To him, father is the old man, who puts up for his expenses and pays his bills without a row. A pretty good old man—never hard on a fellow, always reasonable, and wise enough to let a fellow alone. Very convenient, such a father."

She had hit off Ray's attitude toward his father exactly. I began to feel a very real admiration for this astute young woman, with her original ideas—original in that I knew she had never copied them from those about her. I began to have a glimmering of many things which I had, before, passed by. She had, for the last day or so, addressed me as "kind sir," with a half-mocking air. I had felt the irony—but now I knew that she was disposed to be friendly, and that "Mr. Tenny" had become too formal an appellation for her straightforward nature, while

she could not quite call me Walter, as her mother and father were doing so naturally. From then on, I remember, I called her "pretty maid"—and I tried to match her tone of kindly sarcasm.

We could say no more at that time; for Ray and the other overtook us, and we became quite decorous—and that, in her estimation, must have meant quite commonplace. But my thoughts clung persistently to the girl, with her keen insight and her impatience of life as it is mostly lived.

I looked more critically upon the big, pleasant-eyed sheriff, that evening, and I saw that she was right. His eyes, when they rested upon Ray, held a look that made one's throat pinch together, though he did not in any other way show the idolatry he felt. I saw, too, that he passed Ellie by with careless affection; and I doubted much if he could be brought to believe that she held any desires beyond the pretty things he bought for her, and the limited social life which he permitted her to enjoy. I wondered how he could be so blind; but I suppose he would have laughed at me, and called me in love, if he had known what I was thinking.

Families never seem quite the same, once you are given the key to their real home life; and I began, before dinner was over, to pity Mrs. Wellcome for her chirrupy submission to her lord, and to feel a slight resentment toward that lord for his domination over his women. For Ray, I felt the same amused friendship; for I had known him too long, it seemed to me, to learn any new twist to his nature. For Ellie herself I felt a deep pity, and a breathless sort of admiration for her startling views of life. Beyond that—well, I don't know.

CHAPTER III.

A SILHOUETTE PORTRAIT.

She passed my open door, glanced in, and turned back, to lean against the casing and regard me with that gently mocking amusement which the world and all the inhabitants thereof seemed usually to arouse in her. I smiled tentatively, and put a fly into its place in my book; for by then I had learned to wait her pleasure in speech, and so save a blunted repartee.

"Fishy, fishy in the brook?" she inquired, still with that mocking light in her eyes. "Would you catch perch with a Royal Coachman, kind sir?"

"I would not," I told her. "And I am amazed that a mere woman should recognize a Royal Coachman in the fleeting glimpse you got of it." I shook my head at her. "Pretty maid, I must speak to your father about you; you are too wise for your sex."

"If it took wisdom to master *that*" —she pointed a finger at my green leather fly book—"then mere man would catch no trout. Really, are you thinking of fishing off the porch, or the landing, or where? There are no trout within twenty miles of here."

"Your neighbor, Mr. Steve Johnson, promised to take me to a good stream," I said, too engrossed in my disappointment at his delay to go on with the nonsense—one never got anywhere with her, anyway, in a word battle. I had discovered that much.

She looked at a tiny watch which she wore like a locket—and that was before the style became common. "My neighbor, Mr. Steve Johnson, is very good—at promising," she said slowly. "If you are overhauling your tackle in the hope of his coming—I happen to know that he telephoned to father about some horses, or something, and that they have ridden out on the range together. Father is taking a breathing spell from hunting the Dry Ridge gang, and no one else has been real bad, lately. If you like, I'll take you to a dandy stream."

If I liked! I jumped up, and two leaders flew half across the room.

She smiled at me, and looked again at her watch. "We will take a lunch, kind sir—and do you feel equal to a twenty-mile gallop? I'll have our horses saddled at once, so we can start. It's lucky you made your request early." She gave me another mocking smile; because we both knew that I had requested nothing, and went on down the

hall to her own room. "Ten minutes is all the time I can give you to get ready," she called back, after I had heard her door open. She must have leaned from her window to give her order to the man, "Chub," who did the stable work; for I heard her voice calling, and a faint answer from him.

I was downstairs, and out on the porch, in just eight minutes; but she was ahead of me, and was telling the cook not to be so saving of the sliced tongue in the sandwiches. I went to find her, and I'll always remember the way she looked that morning, with her brown divided skirt, cut quite short—about to her shoe tops, I should say—and leggings, gray hat such as cowboys wear, and a white silk handkerchief knotted around her throat. She was quite the fisherman, too, with her basket and her rod wrapped in the case for carrying. She had a pair of silver-mounted spurs in her hand, and when we went out she buckled them on, and her costume was complete.

I liked her immensely in that rig, and told her so. But it was a thankless thing to pay her compliments; nearly always she passed them over in that utter indifference which would not trouble to reply by word or look. For all that, she was not an ungracious maid, believe me; her indifference to compliments and soft words was too unconscious to give offense.

"I don't suppose Ray would go along if we asked him," I observed, by way of easing my conscience; I had not been much with Ray, these past few days.

"He would not. Ray is an enthusiastic fisherman, in his way—and just now he is angling industriously for smiles. Let us wish him joy of all he catches!" She caught up the reins of her horse, turned the stirrup, stuck in her toe, and went up like a cowboy. One could see that riding was a part of her life, and that she gave no more conscious thought to mounting than she did to the use of her knife and fork at dinner. I began to feel very glad that Steve Johnson had found other business more important than fishing.

Mother Wellcome came to the door, and chirruped after us that we had better take our slickers—by which she meant rain coats—for, if we did not, it would be sure to rain. Ellie glanced up at the sky, turned in her saddle to scan the horizon off toward the southwest, and shook her head dissentingly.

"We'll have heat enough, but no rain. Good-by, mother." She touched her horse with the spurs, and we started off at a gallop, and kept the pace almost into town.

"Mr. Steve Johnson was going to take me in the other direction," I ventured, when I saw where we were going.

"Yes. You are not following Mr. Steve Johnson's trail just now, kind sir."

I will confess that when we rode straight into the main thoroughfare, and up the street toward what one might call the business district, I suspected some trick of the sort which people of the West are credited with playing upon the tenderfoot.

She stopped before an ice-cream parlor and candy store combined, and glanced at me impishly. "What will you take, kind sir? Do you like beer?"

I stammered over a half denial. Honestly, I do like beer, under certain conditions. But I was not at all sure that it would be quite proper to tell a lady that.

"Well, you may go into that saloon and get two pint bottles to take along," she said, in a matter-of-fact way, while she was swinging down. "They will go in your pockets easily—and it's a dry, hot ride to those hills over there." She waved a gauntleted hand to the north. "I don't like the taste of beer, myself. I'm going to take the temperance brand—root beer," she added, seeing the question in my face. "Please don't be long—and, if you would like to fortify yourself with a dish of ice cream before we start, come in afterward. Shall I order for you?"

She might do anything she liked for me, by then. But I merely said yes, and went, a bit shamefacedly, into the saloon for the beer. She was always

taking me aback by something she said or did; and I spent the time while I waited in wondering why all girls couldn't be so straightforward, without losing some of their charm. Afterward, I went into the candy store, and found her leaning elbows upon a little round table, and chatting amiably with a handsome old lady, with silvery hair and lace cap under her bonnet, who was evidently ordering refreshments for a party of some sort.

"Now, be sure it is like that cherry ice you sent last time," the old lady was saying, "and *pineapple* sherbet. Yes, my dear, Lawrence says the fishing is very good up there this year. I hope you catch a good lot of them."

"You heard what she said?" Ellie asked me, when the old lady had swept leisurely out. "Lawrence is a fine judge of streams—at least, he spends half his time whipping them. Let's hurry."

It was a long, hot ride, as she had said; and I was glad enough to wet my throat with the beer before we reached the cooler, wind-swept slopes of the hills. The trail narrowed so that the girl rode always in front—and how she found the way, those last three or four miles, puzzled me. Our horses were wet to the ears—not with the pace we kept, so much as with the endless climbing into deep little gullies and immediately climbing out of them again.

But the end of the trail justified the roughness—a cool, noisy willow-fringed stream, just wide enough for a pretty cast, just deep enough for the rubber boots I had brought. We ate our luncheon in the shade of a willow clump, drank what was left of our beer—because, as Ellie pointed out, it would be cooler, going back, and we could fill the bottles with water, if we liked—and fitted up our rods.

It was right there, after nearly two weeks in Montana, that I first felt truly repaid for coming. And when I had drawn on the boots and made my first cast, I'm afraid I forgot the girl, and all, for a while.

When I landed my first—a fifteen-inch fellow that gave me something of a fight—I looked around for her, and glimpsed her standing for a moment poised on a big rock, casting out into a promising pool. I shouted, and held up my fish; she nodded, reached into her basket, held up one that looked nearly as long as mine, and stepped off the rock on the other side. I did not see her again for three hours.

After the first half hour, I found it slow sport. The sun was hot, and the trout were lazy. When they rose, it was in a half-hearted fashion that just nipped at the fly and let go again; so that I lost a good many. We were fishing upstream, and there were places hard to pass; so that, by midafternoon, I was beginning to feel pretty well fagged, what with that twenty-mile gallop, and the heat, and all. When I rounded a sharp bend in the creek, and saw Ellie lying comfortably in the shade of a rock, I hurried over, and sat down beside her.

"What luck?" she asked, not moving except to tilt up her hat brim for a sleepy glance at me.

"Thirteen—not counting those under size, which I threw back," I answered, lifting the lid of my basket, and turning it so that she could see.

"Thirteen—that's unlucky, kind sir. When it grows cooler, we'll fish back. They'll bite well, I think, just before sundown."

When I looked at her, and was about to remind her of the miles we must ride, she laughed. There were times when she seemed almost to read one's thoughts.

"Oh, if we are out of these breaks by dark, we'll be all right. We can go home much quicker than we came, You'll eat an eleven-o'clock dinner instead of six o'clock, but you must expect such slight drawbacks when you go a-fishing."

"How many did you get?" I asked, not caring to pursue farther the subject of eating; I was hungry, then, if I had cared to own it.

"Oh—I don't know. Count 'em, will you? And then go away somewhere, and let me alone. I'm sleepy."

I looked in her basket, counted nineteen fish, and went away, not quite knowing how I should take such treatment. Not having any other entertainment, I went rather sulkily back to my fishing. Truly, that shady spot had seemed to me very well adapted to conversation of the mildly sentimental sort, and I spent ten minutes or so in searching my memory for another young woman who would have pushed the opportunity so ruthlessly from her. I reflected gloomily that Ray seemed to have all the sentiment of the family, and that his sister would be none the worse for a touch of coquetry in her make-up. Just then I broke my leader on a snag, and forgot all troubles but those of the angler.

It might have been an hour—it was probably two hours—later, when she came suddenly into sight, fishing her way downstream to me; and I will not deny loitering a bit, so that she could come up.

"Did you ever broil trout before a camp fire, kind sir?" she called. "We'll go back where we left the horses, and partake of a slight repast. I'll sacrifice my catch to the greedy god—I've enough for twelve or fifteen apiece, if we want that many; and, luckily, I remembered the salt."

I really have no idea just what sort of a hothouse bud she thought I was, never to have eaten trout cooked in the primitive way. At any rate, I took care to reach the place several minutes in advance, and to have just the right sort of fire going. The thanks I received were characteristic of the girl.

"As hungry as all that?" she bantered, and surrendered her basket quite meekly to me and my pocketknife. "Oh, will you scale my share?" she cried, as I stooped beside the creek.

I could not refrain from grinning at her over my shoulder. "No true sportsman ever wants the scales off his trout. You are toppling upon the pedestal where I had placed you, pretty maid."

"I don't think I am high enough to feel at all dizzy," she retorted, and left me to lead our horses down where they might drink. It goes without saying, I suppose, that I very carefully scraped the scales from twenty-two trout, which, we decided, would be enough.

We ate them all, too, religiously separating them according to number and size. She had one peach of a rainbow—nearly eighteen inches long, I should say—and she very generously gave me half of him. Also, there was one sandwich left, which we divided. She was not the sort of girl who would accept the best of anything as a tribute to her sex.

What with broiling and eating twenty-two fish, and the time I took to clean my own catch, and then fishing for a while to get a few more to take home, it was a good bit after sundown when we finally mounted our horses. We had not got out of the breaks—as she called the jumble of hills and hollows—when a sudden gusty thunder shower drove us to the shelter of an overhang of rock, and kept us there for a long time, dry if we stayed where we were, but likely to be soaked through if we attempted to go on.

Finally, the rain stopped, and we plodded up and down a few more hills made slippery by the downpour; I uneasy in my mind lest we lose—not the trail, for there never was one to lose—but all sense of the direction we must follow. For it was dark, by then—dark with the blackness of lowering clouds and with the swash of a wind grown cold.

"Your mother will be worried," I observed once, making talk after a long silence.

"I don't think so," she responded quietly. "Mother has become accustomed to her brood, by this time. She knows a great many things may have delayed us—besides danger. I can promise you one thing, I think. She will have a snapping fire in the dining-room fireplace, and a hot dinner in the warming closet of the kitchen range, with a pot of good coffee; and she will be sitting up, herself, to make sure nothing goes cold—and to see if we caught any fish."

It all sounded very enticing, and I hoped more than ever that we were going in the right direction; which proved immediately to be the case, for we came out into the trail, and I dimly saw the triumphant glance which she sent me over her shoulder.

"Now we can gallop, and you can feel your blood circulating—and I hope your fears will sleep for the present," she cried. "Porcupine lies straight before you, kind sir."

I made some reply, and we hurried on; for it was growing late, and we had many miles between us and that pot of coffee which she had so optimistically promised. But for a long way the road was sloppy, and in places it was worse; it was sticky—where we struck a patch of adobe, that was. It worried me that we could not make better time; but the girl rode cheerfully beside me, and did not seem to mind the hour, or the pace we must keep. I tried to draw her into giving me more of her startling views of life, but she would not talk except of things most trivial.

After a long, long while, we reached Porcupine; and I could not help smiling, in a depressed way, at her remark of that afternoon, that we would go home much quicker than we came—if I were competent to judge, it had taken us twice as long.

By the quiet streets, by the vacant stare of the stores and dimly lighted offices, we knew that it must be close to midnight—so may one consume the hours upon a heavy trail. She led the way down a side street that was nearly dark, and we came out upon the main avenue at the corner, where stood the candy store.

When I saw her pull up there, I laughed. "More ice cream?"

"Candy," she returned laconically, and added: "Mrs. Olson is a good soul, and she's always willing to sell stuff. She's still in that little kitchen behind the store—I saw her as we rode by. If you'll hold my horse a minute, I'll go in and get some chocolates for mother—and me."

She did not wait for me to consent, but slipped down, and went to the side door near us, and rapped with her knuckles. The candy woman let her in, and the door closed and left me there in the dark.

It must be quite a job to pack a pound or so of chocolates into a pasteboard box and tie a gilt string around. I waited five minutes before it occurred to me that sitting out in a dim side street at midnight may grow monotonous. "And it must be worse to be compelled to work in an office all hours of the night," I thought, and began to watch sympathizingly the shadow of a man's face on the ground-glass partition of the bank opposite me. Only for that shadow, I had no living thing in sight but my horses.

Still she did not come. I stared resentfully across at the bank window, where the man was bent over his desk, as it seemed from the shadow. He turned so that his profile came out sharply, and I felt a puzzled sense of half recognition. But I knew no bank clerks in Porcupine. I turned and looked wistfully at the door where I had last seen Ellie. How long, in Heaven's name, did it take to buy a pound of chocolates?

I looked again for my bank clerk. He was just stooping to pick something from the floor—at any rate, he stooped—and he did not immediately stand up again. I waited a minute, for I wanted to try again at remembering where I had seen him. But Ellie came out of the candy store, the woman standing upon the threshold to chatter some gossipy sentences after her; and I forgot what little interest I had felt in the fellow across the way.

"Did you think I had gone to sleep in there?" She came across the sidewalk to me, and held up something in her fingers. "Eat it—it's good," she commanded.

It was good; and I ate, and forgave her the dallying. We turned out of the side street, and galloped from town and its midnight silence. It had not rained there, that we could see. The trail was hard packed and dusty, and the horses, knowing well that they were

nearing their oats, set a pace that brought us to our own gate in a very few minutes.

The girl was wrong. Mrs. Wellcome was not waiting up for us, though she did call down the stairway to ask how many fish we got, and to tell Ellie that there was strawberry shortcake, and the cream was in the refrigerator, and to be sure she turned out the lights when we were through. "Your father is not back," she added. "He phoned that he wouldn't be home—he had to take the train for Cramer. So lock the door, Ellie."

That's the sort of mother to have—nice and comfortable, never fussy over late hours. She went back to bed, and to sleep—let us hope. At any rate, we heard no more of her; and we drank the coffee that was waiting, hot, on the kitchen range; and Ellie sliced red, lumpy strips off a roast of beef, and cut thick pieces of bread for me. She was just starting for the cream to pour over the shortcake, when the telephone bell rang.

CHAPTER IV.

TO PLEASE A GIRL.

I did not pay much attention to her disjointed conversation at the phone; I'm afraid I was thinking rather greedily of finishing my supper, and was merely waiting, with some impatience, for the cream. It was not until I looked up and saw her face, as she came back into the dining room, that I got an inkling of something unusual.

"The Dry Ridge gang—they have robbed the bank again—the same bank they robbed before! Some one saw them, it seems, and gave the alarm; and they want father. They think that he could surely catch them, this time, if he started immediately——" She stopped dead, and looked at me in a way that sent premonitory shivers down my spine. I did not know what she was going to say, but I divined that it would be something I did not care to hear.

"There are always fresh horses in the stable—come!" She turned toward the outer door, and glanced impatiently over her shoulder.

"Come where?" I stared stupidly.

"Don't be dull! We could beat them to Dry Ridge, if we started immediately, and we could see where they go——"

I looked at my square of shortcake, and from there to the door, which she was holding half open. "We could see a lot of things, no doubt—it's so light!" In reality, it was black dark. "Come, and get me that cream, pretty maid, and don't be foolish. She cannot be a lady bandit, and so she would be a lady sheriff, forsooth!"

That made her angry, but it did not change her purpose. "I am going," she said, with determination. "I beg your pardon for including you in my plan. I forgot that you might be afraid to go!" That, of course, was deliberately intended to sting me into action.

I laughed at her. "Pretty maid, I am braver than you think; I am not afraid of being called a coward by a woman. The cream, please."

Secretly, I was relieved to see her leave the door and start for the refrigerator.

She brought the cream jug, and set it vehemently before me. "I hope you'll enjoy yourself," she told me spitefully. "If mother wakes again and misses me, you may tell her——"

"Certainly. I shall tell her that you are safe in bed. The daughter of such a mother would not go hunting bandits in the dark. She would know how utterly futile that would be. If she were in earnest, she would wait until morning, when there would be some chance——"

"By morning they will be gone——"

"Where no man pursueth," I cut in flippantly.

"Oh, it's always like that!" She was not so very far from tears, just then. "A woman is not supposed to do anything that calls for strength, or courage, or——"

"Pretty maid, you just ought to taste this." I poured more cream over the delicate fragments on my plate. "A

woman is supposed to show superior intellect, when it comes to a matter of running down bandits——"

"I wish you'd stop saying bandits!" she interrupted me crossly, still half determined to go—if one might judge from the way she stood drawing on her gauntlets. "It sounds so—so dime-novelish!"

"That," I retorted gravely, "sounds like swearing, the way you say it. Sit down, and let's discuss this thing sensibly. You are sure the Dry Ridge gang robbed the bank—oh, by George!" I remembered the silhouette on the ground glass, and stopped.

"Well, what is it?" She still had the attitude of waiting impatiently.

"Was it the bank just across the street from the candy store?" I asked. "Because I saw some one in there. I thought it was a clerk, or cashier, or somebody like that. But a clerk would hardly work with his hat on, would he? And this fellow——"

"It was that bank—and they must have been there, then! Oh, if we had only known it, then! We might have caught them—tell me what you saw."

"I saw a man," I answered, "or the shadow of a man's head and shoulders. He was on the other side of the glass partition, and he was bending over a desk, I should judge. I only saw a profile of his face, and then he stooped—perhaps he realized that he could be seen from outside—and I did not see him any more. You came, just then." I did not tell her that the face had looked familiar—she would have insisted at once that I name the man, which would have been impossible. I was not even sure that he was familiar to me.

"It must have been one of them. Oh, why won't you come? We are wasting time——"

"You are," I corrected, glancing at her plate of shortcake. Then I repented my levity, and regarded her seriously. "Do you really and truly believe that you could do anything, out there in the dark? It looked to me like a rather large ridge. And it might have been some other crook who did it. If your gang robbed that bank not long ago, it scarcely seems plausible that they would repeat the cruelty so soon."

She smiled at my choice of words, and sat down. I felt that I had gained a point. "But that's just the way they do," she argued. "They did not get much money, the other time. It would be just like them to try it again. And some one saw them ride out of the alley behind the bank—three of them. He was suspicious, and called the watchman; and I suppose they went and looked—at any rate, they found that the bank had been robbed. So they telephoned right away, while they were getting men together to ride out after them. And since father isn't here——"

"If they are being chased from town," I soothed her, "it will soon develop which way they went. If they headed for Dry Ridge, the posse from town will know. And that," I finished, "is all the information we could possibly gain to-night. So, what's the use? If it were daylight——"

She drew off her gloves, and accepted the cream jug from me—another point gained. "Then, we'll wait till daylight, and start then. And I'll take the dogs. Father sent for them, you know, after these men got to doing all sorts of things. He took them out once or twice, but they couldn't seem to hold the trail. We start at dawn, kind sir."

I did not contradict her, for fear of making her stubborn. Neither did I promise, or in any way give her to understand that I approved the venture. Starting at dawn, just when one really enjoys one's sleep most fully, with bloodhounds to trail outlaws—really, the idea did not appeal to me.

"Do you feel that it is quite kind to go after them with dogs?" I ventured, after a pause. "You admire them, you said; and it really does not seem consistent, even taking into consideration the fact that it is a woman who proposes it. Do you know, it strikes me as being an awfully vindictive thing to do."

She looked at me with that mocking light in her eyes. "Really, it is no Uncle Tom business," she informed me. "The dogs couldn't possibly hurt them, even if they overtook them. They'd shoot the dogs, I suppose, and that would settle it. It merely means that we might be able to track them, and find out where they went. And I do admire, not the crimes they commit, but the spirit they show in having the courage to get out and *do* something. I—I might admire *you,* kind sir, quite as much, if you caught them!"

The flattery of her tone was not easily resisted; but I knew it was flattery, and that helped somewhat. I did not tell her that, to win her regard, I would devote the rest of my life to hunting down the Dry Ridge gang. I looked at my watch instead, and suggested that we sleep upon the question.

"I shall call you at daylight, and you must not take a minute longer than is absolutely necessary to get ready. And you must be very quiet."

I hope I did not look as dejected as I felt. "Shouldn't we let Ray in on this?" I hedged weakly. "He's more accustomed to ban—er—outlaws—and he's crazy to hunt them. He might be offended——"

She stopped me. "Oh, Ray! It would take him an hour to decide upon what shade of socks would go best with the color of his saddle! No, we don't want him. He'd be so full of ideas that we'd end by doing nothing. One thing I like about you, kind sir, is that you haven't any."

That was nice, wasn't it? By the time I had thought of something to say in return for that, she was halfway up the stairs—and I heard her laughing softly to herself as she went.

CHAPTER V.

ON DRY RIDGE.

I heard her rap upon my door, and I turned my head reluctantly, and opened one eye toward the window. So far as I could see, it was still dark; and I was resentful of the disturbance of my dreams—I was just about to land a trout half my own length. It was that resentment, I think, which awoke me. I sat up in bed, and scowled at the closed door.

"You said dawn," I growled. "You might let a fellow sleep till it's time." I did not suppose she would hear, but she must have been listening for some stir.

"I start in ten minutes—with you or without you. It doesn't in the least matter to me." There was an imperious note even in her whisper.

I groaned so that she couldn't help hearing me; but I got out of bed, reached for a shoe, and dropped it purposely, to prove to her that I was coming along. She accepted the signal, and started down the hall, going cautiously—for fear of waking her mother, I suppose. There was no fear of disturbing Ray if he slept in the dead-to-the-world fashion which was his custom, I knew. But, softly though she went, I heard a door open, and her mother asking her sleepily where she was going.

"Just for an early ride and a hunting trip, mother," Ellie told her cheerfully. "Mr. Tenny loves to ride at sunrise. I'm going to show him a new hunting ground."

"I should think you'd had enough riding for a day or two—with that trip you took yesterday," chirped her mother, as querulously as her amiable voice would permit. "Don't be gone all day, Ellie; the Perhams are coming out this afternoon, you know."

"Oh, I'll be back by noon," Ellie assured her—and I groaned again, in good earnest.

I do not think I am lazy, or afraid of a stiff day, now and then; but taking a hard day at one's favorite sport is not quite like riding forth at the first peep o' day on a quest distasteful for many reasons—and fruitless, into the bargain. I could have stayed in my bed, of course, and she may or may not have gone alone; but I had half proposed this thing as an antidote to her determination to ride out at midnight, and I did not see how I

could back up without feeling like a sneak—which would be more uncomfortable than taking the ride. I made haste to dress and follow the energetic young woman downstairs.

She had her own horse saddled, and was just about to tackle mine, I think. She said she could not find Chub; she suspected him of now and then taking unauthorized trips to town. When I had made it plain to her that I might be trusted to put the saddle on my own horse, she left me, to get us something to eat—something which we could carry along and eat in the saddle, because she was still in deadly earnest about catching the Dry Ridge gang, and would not waste a moment in getting started.

A moment, did I say? That girl shaved off seconds with a cool disregard of one's comfort which made me shiver. I mounted and rode up to the house, and she handed me a thick sandwich with a lump of cold roast beef for the chief attraction; and then she got the two dogs in leash, and started for the river crossing at a sharp trot—and never mind whether I swallowed my sandwich whole or dropped it by the way. By way of compromise, I stuck it in my coat pocket, and overtook her just as she reached the ferry.

It was an ingenious contrivance, that ferry. It was held to a system of cables and pulleys, and was run across by force of the current. She seemed to know all about it, and we swung out into the middle of the river before I had quite decided whether I ought to permit her to do what little was done. While I was yet in a painful state of mind over the matter, the scow touched its nose to the makeshift wharf on the other side, and Ellie fastened it and remounted.

We rode up the low, sandy bank to the prairie beyond, and for the first time that morning I was glad to be awake and out of the house. The whole glory of crimson sky and tumbled yellows and violets was before us, and the distant mountain range seemed to be painted with the dye they use for the purples of royalty. Even the nearer hills and the valleys before us were tinged a dainty shade which an artist might name more accurately than I, but which no man could appreciate with a keener sense of its beauty.

"This is worth while, after all," I said unguardedly, forgetting our quest.

She looked at me quickly, and laughed when I would not have blamed her much if she had been angry. "It will all be worth while, once you are fairly into it," she declared. "Why don't you throw off the yoke, kind sir, and be your real self—the self you would be if there were no conventions, no *anything* that fetters one's beliefs and one's actions? Hunt men, if they challenge you to the pursuit and are quite your equals in strength and cunning. It's all a game, anyway. They play it, and enjoy the chance of losing almost as much as the triumph of winning. Right is might, and nothing else—don't you think so? In the world-old philosophy which our forbears learned in the cave days, might *had* to be right. And in those days we learned to prey upon one another—upon the whole world, as we knew it—in the struggle to preserve our own species. We haven't got over the instinct; we still prey upon one another, in some form or other. Some forms are sanctioned by the laws we have made; other forms are frowned upon.

"The Dry Ridge gang, for instance, prey upon those who have a lot of money stored away somewhere. Father and his men prey upon the Dry Ridge gang—or they would, if they got the chance!—and would shut them up for a good many years, because they do not approve of the gang's method. They go about it with such a startling directness, kind sir! They do not give people a chance to see their money fade away, or much hope of getting it back. They use no tact. If they were—lawyers for instance, they might gain quite as much from their victims, but the victims wouldn't mind—they would have been bluffed into believing they had received something in return!"

That I took to be a direct stab at my own profession; I think I said that I was studying law in a rather desultory fashion, with the intention of some day getting down to work.

"The lawyer makes the wisest choice," I contended mildly. "He gets invited out to dine occasionally, and he doesn't have to go blundering about in the dark trying to evade his victims."

"Right you are! But, all the same ——" She glanced ahead wistfully at the rim of hills. "It isn't nearly so picturesque," she sighed. "One would find it much harder to feel any romantic sentiment over the lawyer type of brigand."

I did not answer that remark, though I should have liked to do so.

"And still I'm crazy to hunt them," she went on musingly. "I want to run them to earth, and show them what a 'mere woman' can do; but, if I succeeded, I feel certain that I should simply let them go again. I wouldn't have the heart to be instrumental in sending men to the penitentiary—men who love the open as these men must love it, and who care as little for laws as these men care. They would hate it dreadfully—being shut up in jail, and never riding out in the hills——"

One of the dogs—she called him Texas—gave her some trouble at this point, and when she had scolded him to good behavior again, her mood seemed to have changed. At any rate, she did not go on in the same strain.

"We're just five miles from the foot of Dry Ridge," she told me. "On the other side of this hill, we will strike the main trail from town; but it seems to me, if I were an outlaw making my getaway after a big haul, I should not keep to the trail. There is a narrow draw on the other side of the trail—perhaps half a mile or so—that leads up into the heart of the Dry Ridge. I've a mind to try that; I think it would appeal to me strongly, if I were an outlaw."

Of course, I was not in a position to combat her argument. I knew nothing of the country, and little more of the ways of outlaws. Secretly, I admired the manner in which she was taking hold of the chase, and the way in which she managed her horse and led the two dogs—really, I had not seen any girl quite like her. I had known lady athletes, as Ray called them; but they were not in the least like her. I had known girls who proclaimed themselves rebels against the conventions—they did not resemble her, either. It may have been her absolute freedom from self-consciousness, her innate refinement in the midst of her most unusual behavior, that made her different. Whatever it may have been, I was content to ride silently beside her, munching my sandwich, and trying to analyze her nature to my satisfaction.

We crossed the trail from town, and she told me that the muddle of recent hoofprints stamped deep into the dry earth meant that the posse from town had ridden that way in their pursuit—and she laughed in scorn.

"As if the Dry Ridge gang were silly enough to keep to the main road!" she cried. "Why, it's because they know all the possibilities of this country—and every little coulée where they may ride unseen, and just where it leads, and all about it—that they have kept out of our clutches these five years. Think of it, kind sir! A real, dyed-in-the-wool bunch of outlaws that robs banks and trains—they did, once, but they didn't make a great success of that, perhaps because it was almost their first venture—and all that sort of thing, flourishing right here within easy riding distance of a town like Porcupine! There's the draw, up which I have a hunch they rode last night—that wrinkle out ahead there. Come on. The sun is up, and we must hurry."

Just why we must hurry I could not understand; I suppose she really did expect to find them, though her optimism was certainly not warranted by the facts. She yanked the dogs into a run, put her horse to a little pace, and we raced together over the prairie toward the "draw"—the girl was full

of colloquialisms, although her English and her pronunciation were excellent—where she had the "hunch" they had gone.

I may be timid. I have never been openly accused of the weakness, but I felt decidedly ill at ease because the soil was sprinkled with holes of all sorts—gopher holes, and those made by badgers, she informed me, when I called her attention to them.

"The horses are used to them; they won't fall into one, kind sir," she added, in a soothing tone.

Nor did they. We gained the draw, and I found it to be a grassy furrow in the earth's surface—a green little sunken way, where we might gallop, unseen, straight into the heart of the hills. Ellie swung her horse toward Dry Ridge, and went on without slackening her pace—and I knew that she was enjoying every second as it passed. She looked another girl, almost; and when her eyes turned briefly to mine, I saw how they had lost the rebellious shadow that seemed to live in them always.

"I'm imagining myself the leader of the gang," she laughed. "I'd be willing to bet anything they came up here. The men from town never seem to think of these little places; they just hit the main trail, and pound along up to the Ridge, and poke around on top till their horses give out; and then they straggle back to town, and wonder how the gang managed to give them the slip."

"Is that the way your father hunts them?" I was amused by her attitude of superiority.

"Oh, father has more sense than that. But he's awfully busy, and he has seldom been able to get after them immediately after they break loose. They cover a wide territory with their depredations; though they manage to keep within riding distance of the Ridge, I've noticed. Father gets out and prowls around, and he has taken the dogs and spent two or three days in these hills; but he never could locate their hangout, or trace them, once they struck the Ridge."

She stopped abruptly, and seemed uncertain over another gully which angled away from the one we were traversing. I saw her eyebrows wrinkle; and in a moment she pulled up short, and glanced discontentedly at the dogs. "If they had anything by which to identify the scent——" she began impatiently. Then she dismounted, settled her hat at an angle to keep the sun from shining in her eyes—a particularly rakish angle, which gave her a misleading air of coquetry—and went to the mouth of the tributary gully.

I waited while she walked slowly into it, her head bent as if she were looking for something she had dropped there. She was intent upon finding some trace, and I'll swear she never gave a thought to the striking effect she produced upon me who watched her. In a minute she came back abstractedly to her horse, mounted mechanically, and then hesitated again, looking first at one gully, then at the other. Finally she turned, and led the way up the draw we had been following.

"They wouldn't turn off so soon," she observed, speaking absently. "They would lose time getting into the Ridge country—there's another one, I think, farther along. I should have waited and taken that. It leads right up to the Ridge, and grows crooked and narrow; and if they were followed, they could kill off a whole posse——" She urged her horse again to a gallop, and I followed her.

My blood was beginning to tingle a bit, in spite of myself; and I had several times to pull myself up short from a growing faith in the venture—faith, and something closer than a cousin to joy. Truly, it was getting worth while, this following Ellie Wellcome in her bandit hunt. You couldn't have bribed me into turning back, then.

Sure enough, we came to another branching of the draw; and in to this one she turned, without the slightest hesitation. I could see that she was still imagining herself leader of the Dry Ridge gang, and I began trying

to imagine myself the gang. If I were, I felt that I should have great confidence in my leader, and that I should be intensely loyal as well.

We may have gone a scant half mile before the way grew steep, and rough, and narrow. I remembered what she had said about their killing off a whole posse; and I gave up my pastime of being the gang, and came back to the less pleasant occupation of watching very closely the rocks within shooting distance. Once she caught me at it, and smiled understandingly.

"Oh, they're not here *now*, kind sir; but, if we had come last night when I wanted to, I haven't a doubt we should have been within speaking distance of them." Her voice betrayed the fact that she would not have been sorry.

We went slowly, climbing always, and finding the way rougher as we went along. In spite of her assurance, I rode warily; incidentally, I was rather glad, because I had, at the last moment, slipped my revolver into my pocket—an automatic thing which Ray laughed at and accused of not being a gun at all. But it comforted me, along about that time.

Ellie stopped at another parting of the way. A rocky gorge turned abruptly toward the west—that is, toward the main road, which followed the river.

"I can't help it—I'm going to take that one," she contended with some inner admonition. "I know it leads toward the road, but——" She turned into it, and I rode close to the heels of her horse. It was too narrow there to ride, except in single file, and we went slowly; for it was unmercifully rough, with now and then a big rock that the horses jumped over.

Then, quite unexpectedly, we came out into a tiny basin—not as large as the average tennis court; no, not half as large—where was bright green grass in the middle, and a spring near one side. Ellie dismounted, and looked at me triumphantly.

"An ideal halting place for me and my gang," she exulted. "I didn't know it was here, either. I merely went by opposites when I took that last turn. Logically, we should have taken the other; so—— That's the advantage of being a woman, and obeying intuition rather than logic. You know, given a choice between the two, a woman chooses intuition always. Get down, gang, and take a drink from Outlaw Spring?"

"Is that the name of it?" I asked, dismounting at her command.

She laughed as she took a little telescope cup from a pocket, flipped it into shape, and dipped it full of water. "It hasn't been the name, but you are witness to its christening." She held the cup high above her head, spilled a few sparkling drops to the rocks about the spring, and said solemnly: "I hereby christen you Outlaw Spring, in honor of those who drank here before this day dawned. And here's to the Dry Ridge gang, and to their speedy capture. Here's to holding their fate in my hands! Er—what else, kind sir? Would you like to add a clause?"

I shook my head, and watched her while she drank, her eyes laughing at me over the metal brim of her cup. She held the two dogs back from satisfying their thirst until I had filled the cup for myself, and she pointed to some deep prints in the soft mud, where the spring had overflowed. Whether they were made by a horse or a cow, I could not tell; but she chose to believe it was a horse.

From them she went searching the basin over for clues, while I rested and held her horse and dogs. She was all eagerness over this new game which she had discovered for herself, and she chattered nonsense while she searched. But when she stopped and picked up something from a rocky patch, and stood gazing thoughtfully down at it, I felt the atmosphere of pure joy in a game change to something sterner. Holding it in her fingers, she came across to where we waited in the shade of the rock wall.

She took the leashes from me, called the dogs close, patted them on the head, and talked to them coaxingly.

They were fine brutes, though I don't think they were pure bloodhound. They looked up at her, eloquent-eyed, quivering with impatience. She held something close to their nostrils and, while they sniffed, nervous lipped, talked to them low-voiced, eager as they.

"Seek 'em, Texas! Go get 'em, Bannock! Go on—go find 'em, boys!" She turned from the dogs, snatched the reins from me, and whirled back to watch them. They were circling, snuffing, whimpering, and straining at their leashes.

"I'll let you hold them—we won't turn them loose. We've picked up the trail, all right. See what I found? It's the end of a saddle string. One of them must have tied something to his saddle—or untied it here—and I think he was in a hurry, perhaps. He broke the string, you see. Come! We'll have to lead our horses up the bluff—go ahead with the dogs. I'll bring your horse."

She had surrendered to my superior strength at the crisis; and I was tingling with excitement over the chase, now that it was really on. The dogs pulled me up a dim trail that one could scarcely see, but which made it possible to climb out of that grassy pocket. As we climbed, I caught sight of sliding tracks, here and there, as if others had climbed before us.

Somehow, we gained the top, panting, and all taken up with the sport. We mounted, and the dogs pulled ahead, whining at the restraint. I found that I was going to have plenty to do, holding them in and managing my confounded horse, which had caught the fever of excitement and walked on his hind feet most of the time.

Ellie rode up and took one of the dogs from me; and we went on, hunt mad. I know I quite forgot that it was men we were tracking, and I don't believe Ellie realized it, either. Life and the whole world was narrowed down to following blindly where those quivering nostrils led. I think we were both rather ignorant of trailing with dogs, and I have a suspicion that we tried their patience and their tempers to the limit. We seemed never to go fast enough, I know; and we annoyed them by going slow where the way was rough, when they would have put noses to the ground and gone ahead regardless.

I have a dim recollection of climbing up and down, of traveling rocky levels and dodging soft soil. Sometimes the dogs were at fault, for a moment or two, where the rocks were close huddled and hot in the sun; and we were compelled to pull up and wait for them. Sometimes they pulled so hard that we could scarcely hold them; and I wanted to turn them loose.

But Ellie would not consent to that. "Remember, this hunt is not authorized. I don't know how to call the things back when they get far ahead—you see, I never was out of the yard with them before!"

Wise girl, to hold back that confession until now! If I had known that, I think I should have felt more doubtful than I did over the trip.

After an unmeasured time—during which we halted, went on, doubled, circled, and seemed to get nowhere in particular—we came to a place where the rocks ended suddenly, and four or five gullies wandered off in different directions. We were just congratulating each other upon having the dogs to point the way, when they both set up a terrific sneezing and came watery-eyed to us—for sympathy, perhaps. We tried to put them back on the trail, but it was no use; they nearly sneezed their heads off, and pawed dirt in their faces, and seemed to be altogether uncomfortable.

"It's pepper, I think," Ellie said disconsolately. "Father said they ran into it last time they were out. They drag a bag of it along, it seems; and the dogs pick it up, and can't follow the scent." She dropped in the saddle, staring wistfully at the jumble of ridges and deep gorges before us.

"Oh, you Dry Ridge gang!" she cried at length, lifting a gloved hand to hold her hat against the wind that was blowing up the Ridge. "I'll catch you yet—you'll see!"

She sat there for some minutes—studying, as it seemed to me, the Ridge and all its possibilities for hiding and dodging about unseen. While she waited, I myself took a careful survey of the country—the greatest jumble of barrenness I had ever seen, I think.

Dry Ridge itself was an immense plateau—long and narrow, and covered mostly with lava rock in great layers, flush with the yellow soil. To the mountains it went, and to the river, where I could see it end in yellow sandstone cliffs at the water's edge. From it, running in all directions, twisting and turning and doubling, went gashes like the one we had come up to reach the Ridge. I turned in the saddle, and saw Porcupine away in the distance—a blot of smoke, and indeterminate houses, and shining windows like a sprinkle of stars. Nearer, we looked down upon Big Bend ranch and the long loop of desolation behind it. It was a great place for outlaws, all right. They could see the whole country, and dodge into hiding long, long before any one could get to them, even if they were discovered—as it seemed to me they might be, with good glasses.

"Kind sir, let's go home," said Ellie at last, her voice tired and listless with disappointment. "We'll turn the dogs loose—they'll follow, all right. We can't do any more to-day—but I won't give up, now I'm started." She held up the broken saddle string, and looked at it long. "It isn't much, is it?" She laughed weakly. "But it's something. It—it belonged to one of the gang."

She tied it around her saddle horn—to keep the scent of it as free as possible from any foreign element, she said—and I saw her often glancing thoughtfully down at it, as we rode silently down to the trail.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHERIFF TAKES THE TRAIL.

The big, homey porch seemed to be the centre of gravitation at Big Bend, when we rode up. Ray was there in the hammock—at least, the greater portion of him was in the hammock, though a lot of him trailed out and down to the floor—holding his big pipe in one hand and a fan in the other; and all at once I knew that it was hot, and past noon, and that I was hungry, and tired, and unreasonably resentful of his apparent comfort. His father was there, also, standing with his hands in his trousers pockets, watching our approach.

"You're a fine bunch!" Ray greeted, getting to his feet. "Here's all kinds of doings, and dad in a stew, and me holding him back by main strength waiting for you! I hope you're grateful! What d'ye think, Walter? The Dry Ridgers have broken loose again—robbed a bank in town last night, and dad has promised to let us go out with him. He's just waiting for the dogs——" Ray glanced at his father, and seemed suddenly conscious that his "old man" would like a chance to say a few words.

He came down the steps, and I felt his displeasure before he had said a word. "Where yuh been, Ellie?" he asked her bluntly—I suppose because he felt the restraint of a host's duties toward me.

"Oh, just—around in the hills." Ellie seemed to catch her old inner combativeness from his tone. She did not look at me at all, so I had to lay my own course by instinct.

"And what did yuh take the dogs for? Think I shipped 'em in here to run jack rabbits with? I need 'em—need 'em bad, right now—and I suppose they're played out, fooling around. After this, you leave the dogs at home, Ellie. I don't want 'em made footsore chasing over the prairie for fun."

"Oh, all right." Ellie's tone was airily indifferent both to dogs and men. "But you haven't used them for a long while, and they were wild for a run."

I suppose a dutiful daughter would have taken the trouble to explain more fully; but I did not blame the girl for keeping silent, then or afterward.

"If I knew in advance just when I'd need 'em—I wouldn't have any use for 'em at all!" her father retorted. "There was a big robbery pulled off last night

in town"—he stooped to pat Texas, fawning at his knee—"and I wish you'd left the dogs alone. I wanted 'em fresh. Now——"

"Oh, never mind the dogs, dad! We can trail 'em up just about as well without. Remember what I told you, Walter? You can have a real bandit hunt now—the Dry Ridge gang, at that. Dad heard about it when he got into town on the train, this afternoon. We'd have started right out, only I jollied him into waiting for you. Talk about sport—beats trout fishing, old man! We're going to stay out two or three days—longer, if we don't round 'em up before. You want to be in on it, old chap. Going to take the dogs, dad?"

"Oh—I reckon I might as well. Spoils 'em, though, to run jack rabbits. You leave 'em in the yard after this, Ellie." He had told her that once, but I suppose he wanted to impress it upon her memory.

We rode on to the stables, and dismounted. I glanced two or three times at Ellie's face, trying to read her thoughts. She had gone back to the old, inscrutable look, however; and I could tell nothing except that she was going to emulate the calm. She did not speak at all until we had started back to the house.

"Are you going with them?" she asked, then, impersonally.

"Shall I?" I tried again to meet her eyes.

"Suit yourself, Mr. Tenny."

I was just wondering why I should be included in her displeasure, when she seemed to realize the foolishness of snubbing me because of her father. "Let him take the dogs, if he likes!" she said fiercely. "He won't find anything—and we have *this.*" She held up the broken saddle string between her thumb and forefinger. "I wonder what father would give for this little strip of leather!" She laughed shortly. "He won't get it, though; he won't hear of it, even—from me."

"Nor from me, pretty maid," I promised quickly, because I felt it would give her pleasure. "We were foolish to take the dogs out after jack rabbits—but it was great sport while it lasted!"

She smiled understandingly at me, and I felt amply rewarded.

"There'll be more sport of the same sort, kind sir," she said, when we were near the house. "I can't rest, now, till I find them. I'm going to hunt the country over, foot by foot, until——" She stopped abruptly when she saw her father coming from the porch, and I knew that the search would be secret, if she could keep it so.

That is why I made the most of my weariness—my muscles were deuced sore, I remember, from taking two long rides so close together when I was not accustomed to the exercise—and begged off, in the face of Ray's rather boisterous protest and the sheriff's very evident misconception of me. I'll swear he thought I was half afraid to face the various possibilities of the trip, and the hardship of sleeping out under the stars. But I stuck to my refusal, and watched from the porch while they started off—Ray, his father, and two deputies, one of whom was Steve Johnson, who had heard about the robbery and had ridden over to offer his services—because he liked the fun of it, he confided to me.

"Too bad you aren't going along," he said, when they were nearly ready. "There's nothing like it, once you get hardened to the saddle and the camp cooking. And I could put you wise to some good trout holes that you could ride out to by yourself afterward, if you wanted to. I've been kept pretty well on the jump, this last week, or I'd have made good on that promise."

I told him it was all right, and that some other time we might get out together. Then Ellie came out to see them start.

Some things, slight in themselves, stand out wonderfully in one's memory; the look in Steve Johnson's eyes when he turned to greet her will stay a long while with me, I'm afraid. It isn't the first time, either, that I've seen the love light on the face of man or maid. I turned instinctively to her,

and—well, something pinched hard in my chest; something not quite like fear, though that is the only name one could give it. I'm trying to be perfectly frank about this whole matter, so I will own that I was horribly afraid that her answering look meant something which would give me pain. There was nothing in their words to cause uneasiness—just a good-morning sentence, and the gladdening of eyes at sight of each other. Then he mounted, a bit behind the others, and turned again to lift his hat in farewell to us both.

She stood on the steps, and shaded her eyes with her hand while she watched them go. I looked at her and wondered—foolishly, because it was so absolutely futile—what she was thinking about, and whose figure it was that stood out clearest to her in the little group of horsemen.

When they had swung across the river on the little ferry, and had ridden up over the sandy bank and out of sight, she turned, without a word to me or to her mother, and went into the house and upstairs, leaving me in a very disagreeable mood, I must own. I proceeded straightway to forget my new-born interest in the Dry Ridge gang and the catching of them, and to speculate upon the extent, form, and outcome of her friendship with this very good-looking young neighbor of hers. Not that it mattered to me—at least, I kept telling myself that it did not matter. I only wondered, that is all.

CHAPTER VII.

WE COMPARE CLUES.

I excused myself from the chitter-chatter and the clink of cups—claret punch the guests were sipping, more or less gracefully, on the porch—and went down to a shady spot which I had discovered by the river, where I could be alone and think things out. I had begun to feel that things needed thinking out, and needed it badly; but, once I was settled to my physical satisfaction, I found that I was extremely hazy regarding the things, and inclined to dream. I lay in the grass and stared drowsily at the river—you remember I had slept little the night before, what with the lateness of our return and the early start we made in the morning—and became absolutely empty of thought.

I think I slept, and perhaps I dreamed over the sequence of events, which had seemed trivial while they passed, yet which linked themselves together like a slender chain—a mere fragment of a chain, it is true, but still a chain.

First I saw Big Bend, with its desolation of sand dunes and scrubby forest and little grassy glades. I did not consider that the first link, by any means, because it had no relation to the next—the shadowed profile upon the ground-glass partition in the bank at the time of the robbery. To be sure, my mind took up the sequence of events from that ride through the Bend; so that I went over my visit to the Johnsons'—a place which Ray seemed to have become fond of visiting, by the way, with the result that I had scarcely seen him, except mornings and evenings. But I knew that there was nothing important in my visit there—I just remembered it as coming directly after our ride through the Bend.

The first thing I considered a clue was that silhouette portrait; and, as it came out clearly in my memory, I was more than at first tormented by the elusive likeness which it bore to some one I had seen. Some man I had met in town, he must have been; for I had several times gone in with Ray and "dubbed around," as he called it, among his acquaintances. But would Ray be likely to number one of the Dry Ridge gang among his friends? It was not probable; yet that resemblance haunted me the more because I tried to make light of it, until I was at the point of admitting that the shadow I had seen was made by the face of some man I had met since coming here. If I could once identify that man, I should have taken a long step toward

helping the sheriff apprehend the robbers.

Then, when my thoughts finally consented to lay the problem by for the time being, I drifted on to our ride that morning, and to the clue which Ellie had fancied she found. I swung back to that familiar profile, and compared the two. I was certain that I had seen that fellow in town, somewhere. And I was also certain that, if he did live in town, he would not be likely to ride so far into the wilderness—he would be more apt to show up in his usual haunts; and so avoid suspicion. I felt very bright when I had made that deduction.

"So that piece of string probably never saw the Dry Ridge gang," I finished.

"And what makes you think that, kind sir?"

I started up, and realized that I must have been asleep, and also that I must have spoken that last sentence aloud. Ellie was standing quite close, and she was smiling down at me, with all the old mocking light in her eyes and hiding in the corners of her lips. I sat up, and smoothed my hair into place.

"Why aren't you up at the house, claret punching with your guests?" I asked her severely. I had learned that one got on better with Miss Wellcome if one were not too placating and meek.

"Oh, I godspeeded them half an hour ago," she answered, as she smoothed down her summery white frills and crumpled herself into the grass beside me. "What makes you think that saddle string never saw the Dry Ridge gang?"

I reached mechanically for my cigarette case, and tried not to blink at her absolutely like an owl in the sun, though I was still dull with sleep. To gain time, I selected a cigarette very carefully, lighted it, and held the match until it had burned to my fingers before I threw it out into the river. Even then, I watched it go floating down in the grip of the current before I answered. What a godsend to a man are the little details of starting a smoke, when he is studying and hesitating over his answer to a shrewd woman's questions!

"Pretty maid," I began mysteriously, when the match stub was quite lost to sight, "I've been thinking."

"How lovely!" she cooed.

"A high-school girl would have interrupted me there, with those very words, in that very tone," I rebuffed. "I've been thinking, pretty maid. I have made up my mind that there *isn't* any Dry Ridge gang."

The stare she gave me swelled my bump of conceit an inch, I'm sure.

"To show you why I think so, I must tell you something I haven't before mentioned; I think I shall have to tell your father, though, when he returns. As sheriff, I believe he ought to know about it; it might help him in the search."

She regarded me strangely. "Are you joshing?" she asked slangily, but very much in earnest.

"No, this is on the level," I replied, in like manner.

"Then, as the sheriff's daughter, I ought to know first," she declared, though how she would have defended that argument in court I do not know. "What is it, kind sir? Don't leave out a word."

"Well," I began, "when I saw that man's face, or the shadow of his face, in the bank, I didn't tell you then—indeed, I didn't give it much thought at the time—but the profile was perfect; a silhouette of features that were, somehow, familiar to me. I couldn't place him then, and I can't do it now. But, the more I think of it, the stronger is my conviction that I have seen that fellow before. Now, I haven't met many people, you know, barring a few near neighbors, save the fellows Ray has taken me among in town. We've plugged around a good bit, one time and another, and I've met quite a lot of men. I'm positive that one of those men is the original of that shadow, pretty maid. I'd swear to it. And if that is the case, you're hunting cold when you search the Dry Ridge country. I feel sure that your gang lives

right in Porcupine, and has lived there all the time. I'd swear to that likeness —once I locate the fellow."

She curled one slippered foot under her skirts, tucked a bushel of crisp white ruffles over and around it in an unthinking fashion, and stared, vacant eyed, across the river. And for five minutes I did not interrupt her. She was thinking; and I knew that the brain under all that silky brown hair *could* think, and think very clearly. So I let her be, and watched her hopefully.

"If your theory is correct," she said, at last, without changing her position, "then my saddle string, as you say, means nothing. It was dropped there by some cowboy or other—watering his horse at that spring, while he was out after stock, we'll say. Cowboys do stop at springs to water their horses, and to take a drink themselves; and they do sometimes break their saddle strings, tying or untying their coats. It was freshly broken, as any one could see by the raw leather.

"But now—see here. I put the dogs on that trail—the trail of the saddle-string scent, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"And they kept that trail without much trouble, didn't they?"

"Yes, they did." It was mere form, but I admitted the fact.

"And while following that trail, they ran into the pepper, didn't they?"

"They sure did." I smiled when I remembered their performance.

"Well!" She looked at me triumphantly. She even shook one finger at me impressively, and got upon her knees, so that she could face me. "Listen, kind sir! Cowboys don't drag pepper bags after them when they ride the range, hunting stock!" She sat down again, and curled up in her ruffles, while she waited for that fact to soak well into my system.

"But——" I began weakly, and stopped, more weakly than I began.

"Yes—*but!* But what? They're very cunning. They may—they probably *have* an accomplice in town, and you may have seen him. They must certainly have some reliable source of information, because—listen here: The other time they robbed that bank, there had been quite a large sum of money shipped out unexpectedly that very day, and they got only a few thousand—nine or ten, or somewhere along there. Father knows the president very well, and he told him. And last night, when they tried it again, they annexed over eighty thousand dollars—in gold, all of it. The bank doesn't always have so much—it isn't such a large bank—and they had just got in a shipment, for some reason. That's a lot of money. In gold it's—well, more than a pocketful! They took it to the hills; I'm sure of it. They couldn't very well carry it around with them, could they?"

"I should say not," I admitted.

"Believe me, kind sir, there *is* a Dry Ridge gang. And some day this will be enough, figuratively speaking, to hang the lot of them!"

She held something out to me—a small, round tin box, such as druggists use for salve. The edge, I saw, was sealed all around with blue letter wax. I suppose I must have looked inquiring, for she laughed aloud.

"It's the saddle string," she informed me, patting the box affectionately. "I don't know very much about these things, but I have a hazy conviction that it wouldn't hold the scent long unless it were given every opportunity. That's why I tied it around the saddle horn, coming home, and was careful to handle it as little as possible. So I found this box, and sterilized it thoroughly, and sealed the string up in it until——" She dwindled into dreaming.

"Until we get another chance at the dogs," I supplied cheerfully. "Or until the Dry Ridge gang grows industrious again."

"I'm afraid that won't be very soon. They made quite a haul, this time; and the country is thoroughly aroused over it. Father feels that it's almost now or never, because, with people so stirred up, and every one vowing vengeance, they'd hardly dare, bold as they are—— Oh, I can't help it—I

envy them the intoxication of playing hide and seek with their whole world! It's a little world, I know, and stealing money is not a laudable enterprise, say what you will; but to sit away up on some high, safe place and watch—through a pair of field glasses, perhaps—while the posses wander around blindly in the Dry Ridge country, hunting always cold! Father deputized over two dozen men in town before he came home, mother told me, to go out in posses of four or five, and gave them different bits of territory to cover. There's a bank detective or two already hard at work—they'll sure be stiff and lame to-night!—and they're going over the whole country with a fine comb, they say. And for three or four—there can't be many—men to pit their cunning against all that array of law and order—and the telegraph and telephone wires humming in the search, too——

"But do you know, I believe in my heart that you and I, stopping at home as we are, are nearer to finding them out than all the detectives and sheriff's deputies put together!" She was standing, now, gazing down at me, shiny eyed, with the little tin box clasped tight in her hands.

Looking up at her from where I half lay in the grass, I'm afraid I rather lost sight of the point of her discourse in my admiration of her as a woman—a pretty woman, and one greatly to be desired.

"We ran into the pepper trail before we had learned anything of value," I suggested at random.

"But there's the silhouette! You said you would know the man—the accomplice."

I did not feel so sure, just then. I shook my head vaguely. "If I saw him in that position, perhaps. But, really, you mustn't ask me to go about the streets looking for the gentleman, and expect me to point him out to you, on sight, with a thou-art-the-man assurance. My impression is too intangible for that sort of thing. It would be purely an accident, pretty maid, if I recognized the fellow. Please keep that well in mind, and don't expect too much of me."

She looked down at me gravely, as if she were measuring carefully my possibilities. "I don't expect very much of you, kind sir. You don't know enough about the country, and you're too full of college stuffing yet to do much clear thinking out of your own mind. But you're awfully comfortable to be with—do you know? You let me say whatever I like—and I do talk at random, sometimes, just to see how my crude ideas of things sound when they are put into cold-blooded English. They do sound queer, some of them! But if you're shocked, you're certainly very nice about it; you never let me see—and I've never before had a friend I could say upsetting things to, without having a few tons of moral platitudes thrown at me." She stopped, and smiled distractingly down at me.

I came near spoiling everything, right then, by saying something sentimental. But she went on, before I had the chance to make a fool of myself:

"And about this Dry Ridge gang, I know the country because I grew up in it. I know the people and the—well, we'll say the spirit of the country, the atmosphere—for the same reason. I think I understand the viewpoint of these outlaws better than you do, because I've a germ of deviltry tucked away somewhere in my own nature, that makes me sympathize with their outlook, to a certain degree. I believe I can run them down. But I do need you, kind sir, because I'm a woman and don't like to ride those hills quite alone—there's too much feminine timidity in the evolution of women, let's say! That relieves me from calling myself a coward. You see? Your masculine strength and protection leaves me quite easy in my mind, so that I can think."

"Thank Heaven I'm big and not a sissy, then!" I laughed.

She took me quite seriously. "Yes. If you weren't big and—and a manly man, in spite of your conventional upbringing, I should refuse to be bothered with you. As it is, you're a help

and a comfort." She sat down again, and continued, in a disconcertingly matter-of-fact way: "And the best thing about you, I think, is that you have such good sense, and don't feel you must be making love all the time. I hate a man who does that. It—it makes me sick!"

Imagine being told that, just when a fellow is beginning to fall in love! For I was, straight enough. I had known it for ten minutes before she made that speech, and I had been just watching for an opening to give her a hint of my feelings. I felt very much as if I had been running unwittingly toward a precipice, and had seen my danger, and stopped just short of falling over. I said: "It *is* sickening," with all the fervor I could muster on short notice, and searched diligently in the grass for something, with my face turned from her. Narrow escape, that!

"It's such a relief to know a man who can and will be just a good chum, without any silly speeches and slush. I've tried so many, and they all turned out badly—but you!"

"Did—Steve?" Really, I had no intention of saying that; it was one of those awkward sentences which say themselves.

"Why?" She turned that inscrutable look toward me, and I could have knocked my head against a rock for blurting out such a thing.

"I—he struck me as being—as having possibilities——" I don't know where I should have floundered, if she had not interrupted.

"Why? Because he's handsome? So are you, for that matter." It was not a compliment, the way she said it. "I never tried to make a chum of Steve Johnson, so I really don't know how he would turn out in that respect. Perhaps he would be a great success."

Of a sudden, I turned honest. "Pretty maid, as pals, we must be frank. Steve looked at you as if—as if he wanted to kiss you! And no one wants to chum with a person who's in love; they're so apt to be absent-minded and to—to say things at the moon. I hope you won't ever be guilty of repeating poetry about somebody else's eyes and noble soul when I am around!" It was blunt, but I was desperately afraid of that hedging business.

She did not look at me, and the cheek toward me was very pink—which I considered a bad sign. And, though she laughed, she was not convincing. "Kind sir, I hope we aren't silly enough to quarrel over—any other man. I'll promise not to say one word at the moon, if that is what distresses you. I do love moonlight, though. I love to saddle my horse and ride out—— Do you know where I love to ride when the moon is full—only mother hates it, so I seldom do? Down in the Big Bend, kind sir! Those sand dunes look so weird and——"

"B-r-r!" I shivered in spite of myself. "I should think they must," I added. "And I can't say I blame your mother; I see where she's right."

"I never go very far," she sighed, "because there's never anybody to go with me. I don't want Chub, and father is seldom home, and would be shocked if I asked him. But now I have you, and some night we'll sneak off and ride to the very end. *You* aren't afraid of bobcats, *are* you?"

Of course I said no, and it was the truth, as far as the bobcats were concerned. The whole place was so deuced weird and desolate that I hated what little I had seen of it.

"We'll go, when the moon is right and the air is soft and it seems a sin to sleep. I love it. One can forget, then, that life is petty, and spoiled by being always measured by the little tin rule of convention. I'd like to do something *big*—something that hasn't been done at least fifty million times before!"

"Pretty maid, you can easiest accomplish that by being just your own—self," I told her foolhardily, leaving out one or two tender adjectives at the last, in a burst of prudence.

She regarded me suspiciously. "Meaning what?"

"Meaning simply that I'm positive no fifty million women like you ever lived before you, or will live after you. You

see"—I sat up, and set myself seriously to the task of extricating myself from the suspicion of bordering too closely on "slush"—"I've known quite a lot of women in my time—nice ones, too, some of them. One"—I lied a bit—"*extra* nice, you know." I made my eyes as dreamily calflike as possible for a full minute after, because I knew that she was watching me closely. When a sufficiently lovelorn interval had passed, I came back, with a really artistic half sigh, to the subject. "But not one of them was the least bit like you, pretty maid. I never heard them make a single dynamitical remark"—good word, that, if I did say it first!—"or sigh over a bunch of bank robbers one minute, and be wild with ambition to catch and hang them the next. And they all rather enjoyed being made love to, and rather resented it if a man didn't."

"Silly things!" she commented briefly, and to the point, as usual.

"Yes, weren't they? And, do you know, I rather like you, pretty maid, because you don't expect or demand that sort of thing. A fellow does grow tired of having to keep watch of the conversation and always hand out a bouquet when he gets the cue. It's nice to be able to cut out that sort of thing, without being called names behind one's back."

She seemed to think that this deserved two minutes of meditation. Then: "Did *she?*"

"Did who? Did she what?" I was truly puzzled, because I had never had a particular "she" tucked away in my heart—before.

"Did the one who was *extra* nice demand that sort of thing?"

There I caught her at being purely feminine, after all! "If she had," I parried, "do you think I would have found her extra nice?"

Again there was a touch of pink in her cheeks, as if she realized how I might have interpreted her question. "No, I suppose not. I had forgotten that you are not like other men."

I felt that I ought to prepare her for future contingencies, so I said: "Indeed, I am not! When you hear me saying sweet things, pretty maid—to a girl—you may feel sure that I am desperately in earnest, and that I am at the point of carrying her off. You will know that the girl will have to accept me, because I shall not permit her to refuse me. Er—do you think that Johnson girl cares anything for Ray?" I felt that I had done a fine thing when I threw out that hint.

"If she does, I am sorry for her, that's all," she replied, with some indefinable change in her voice. "Because father won't hear to anything—he made *me* give her up, just as a friend. So you'd scarcely think he would let Ray marry her, even if they were both in love. I don't know Ray, these days; he has been away so long, just when he was developing some shred of individuality. But I feel that he is in earnest, this time. He doesn't say anything."

"That *is* a bad sign," I admitted, remembering that for a week Ray had refrained from roosting upon my dresser, in his pajamas, while he fondled his pipe and rattled on about his latest heartbreak. He was usually full of "she said" and "she looked" and "I told her" and "Gee, you ought to have seen the look!" and so on, until I had a complete report, almost, of what passed between him and the latest "peach."

But I soon forgot Ray, and began to wonder if her father had also made her give up Steve—as a friend! He had not been to the ranch since I came, except that day when they had merely spoken a greeting; and the look in his eyes when they rested upon her told a great deal, it seemed to me. I don't say that I was jealous, but I was certainly uneasy in my mind when I thought of him. I glanced at her, and saw that she was staring, dreamy eyed and wistful, at the river; I could not long bear that attitude of complete detachment, without trying to bring her thoughts back to me.

"Have you caught and hanged them yet?" I bantered, flipping a cigarette end into the water.

She started, gave a little embarrassed laugh, and passed her fingers across her eyes. I'll swear she hadn't been thinking of the Dry Ridge gang, and also that she wanted me to believe that she had been.

"You spoke of telling father about that shadow—that silhouette you saw," she said. "I wish you wouldn't, kind sir. Let father hunt them in his own way, and find his own clues. The chances are that he would just laugh at us if we told him what we have discovered. As a father he's a dear, of course, and I think a lot of him—but as a sheriff he's horribly self-sufficient—boneheaded, it's called out here. He wouldn't thank us. He has been sheriff—this is the third term—and, except for the Dry Ridge gang, no lawbreaker ever got away from him. Of course, *they* haven't, either, for good and all. He's a stern man on the trail of some fellow he wants; he's not the man who can be easily beaten or fooled. I wonder that they have kept out of his reach so long; and now he's apt to get them, he's going about it so thoroughly.

"Let's not say anything to him—to *any one*—about our clues, kind sir. Let's play a lone hand, you and I!"

"With all my heart, and as long as—you like," I began earnestly and finished awkwardly, because I had meant to say something a little different.

"You're such a comfort, kind sir!" She got up, shook out her white ruffles, and smiled down at me again. "We'll try again, in a day or so. I know you must have some pretty sore muscles just now, so we'll wait. Perhaps until the posses are in; they can't stay out there always, you know. Then we'll go fishing. There are some good trout streams out across the Ridge."

"So Steve told me."

"And you won't mention your shadow—or this"—holding out the tin box—"or any of our theories, will you? This is *our* game. They—I could almost call them our gang!"

I rose, and stood close beside her, fairly aching with the desire to take her in my arms. "It's our game and our gang, our saddle string and our shadow," I said, as caressingly as I dared—surely I might woo her by voice, if not by words!—"and we won't share with a single living soul. Our only confidants are Texas and Bannock, and they won't tell."

She gave me a look which was almost as good as a kiss, and we went up to the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHERIFF RETURNS.

Since I did not start this chronicle of events with the intention of making it a love story, I'll just pass over the next few days, when the only important thing I did—to my mind—was to say commonplaces in an I-love-you tone to Ellie.

I think it was the sixth or seventh day before the sheriff returned, with his little posse grouped around him, and the dogs, too thoroughly docile to need a leash, trailing listlessly after. Dusty they were, grimy with the rough trail they had followed, and worn with heat and sun and wind and little sleep. Their horses were sweat roughened and gaunt, and in their faces one read defeat and disappointment.

Even Ray had little to say, and seemed to have forgotten his Gibson profile and the matching of his socks with the rest of his costume. His gray hat had a dejected droop—picturesquely becoming, because he had not set it in place before a mirror—and the wrinkles of his soft silk shirt seemed to speak of real living. I was half sorry that I had missed that trip, for all I had enjoyed myself very well during their absence.

The sheriff swung down at the porch, and gave the reins to Chub, who had come up. "Give him a good rubdown," he ordered. "He sure needs it—and Ray's cayuse, too. Hello, folks! How's everybody?"

"Evidently more comfortable than you are," I ventured, watching a bit jealously while he kissed Ellie on the cheek, and thinking I could do it much better. "No luck, eh?"

"No, damn 'em!" he replied grimly, and went into the house. Ray had already disappeared—I suppose to make himself immaculate—and Steve Johnson and the other deputy sat upon their horses as if they were awaiting further orders. Steve, I felt, was conscious of nothing but Ellie's presence, though he kept his face mostly turned away, and smoked industriously a newly rolled cigarette. Ellie was sitting sidewise upon the porch railing, swinging a slippered foot, and watching them all with that half-amused, half-scornful air which I had come to know so well. If her eyes by chance rested upon Steve, I saw that she turned them away with something very like impatience.

"Say, you fellows better get down and wait for lunch," Wellcome called, from the open door. "The lady of the house says it won't be more than half an hour."

The strange deputy—his name was Oleson, or Jenson, or something—accepted the invitation without the slightest hesitation, as if it were a command which he must obey.

Steve, however, slid straight in the saddle, and put his free foot into the stirrup. "I've got to get home," he said, and looked wistfully at Ellie.

"So sorry you can't stay—good-by," she told him, in a sweet society tone, her eyes all stormy defiance.

He gazed back at her intently, glanced questioningly at me, lifted his hat, and nodded farewell, even while he was passing around the corner of the house.

I looked involuntarily at her, met her eyes squarely, and saw that my thoughts were treading close to a very sensitive spot. For a second, she faced me, her eyes defiant and pleading, her lips a-quiver. Then she turned her head, called to Bannock, and went down the steps, to meet him and pat his sleek head and talk to him foolishly.

I went away down to that shady spot by the river, and flung myself in the grass; and I don't know what I really did think. Just a muddle of unhappiness and pity and jealousy, I suppose—a mixture which I found exceedingly uncomfortable, believe me!

It must have been a couple of hours later when I heard some one walking close, and sat up hopefully. It was the sheriff, though. He was in his shirt sleeves, and wore an old straw hat; and he carried a stout bamboo rod—one of the ten-cent kind—over his shoulder. Without seeing me, he sat down, with a grunt of satisfaction, in a cool spot on the river bank, and proceeded to bait a good-sized hook with a fat white grub. I watched him until he had flung the bait adroitly into a deep hole behind an uprooted tree, and then I sauntered over and sat down beside him.

"Hello!" he murmured, around the cigar he was smoking. "This is the kinda fishing I take in mine. Been out, lately?"

"Not since you left," I told him. "Miss Wellcome has promised to take me out to a stream beyond Dry Ridge. I suppose it's quite safe, now?"

He eyed me sidelong, and chuckled. "Safe as a meeting house, m' son. If the Dry Ridge gang is holding out over there, they've sure gone into a rabbit burrow. We hunted every foot of the Ridge, from the river to the mountains, and every draw we could ride into—and some we couldn't. We couldn't find nothing."

"Not even a sign of them?"

"Not a damn sign." He had a bite, there, and the rod bent and wove to and fro. He swung it back, and landed a half-pound perch. "That's the stuff!" He got up stiffly to unhook it and rebait with another fat white grub. "You can have your faked-up flies and your four-ounce rods! This suits me, m' son."

I smiled, and waited until he was settled again, with the grub dangling in the deep hole. "I hear they got off with over eighty thousand in gold. They couldn't have taken that very far, do you think? Wouldn't they almost be compelled to bury it somewhere?"

"Nearer ninety thousand, it was," he corrected. "Yes—it's a cinch, almost,

that they've got it cached somewhere. The devil of it is to find out *where*. The dogs seemed to get a trail once or twice. Couldn't hold it, though. That's a hell of a place over there, Walter."

I nodded. "It's pretty big," I observed.

"Big, and rough, and hard to track anything. Once they get out of town, they've got things almost their own way. It's pure luck, almost, if we get 'em." He stopped to manœuvre another bite, lost the fish, and swore softly. "If I could give all my time to it, I might get 'em—in six months or a year. I'd have to camp right on their trail, though—supposing I could find one to camp on—and let everything else slide. And that I can't do. Yes," he mused, after a silence, "ninety thousand dollars is quite a wad. Makes a load for a horse, put it in gold—over two hundred and seventy-five pounds, at a rough count. How'd you like to have that much set down in front of yuh, m' son? Wouldn't be bad, eh?" He laughed idly, lifted his hook from the water, inspected it, and flung it into a new spot. "Those blame' shiners are great to steal your bait."

"No, it wouldn't be bad. But I don't believe I'd take the chance they did, to get it."

He raised his head, and looked speculatively away to Dry Ridge in the distance. "Oh, they took a chance, all right," he said. "But they've got the gold, m' son! If they get caught, though, it'll be all day with 'em. You bet, they took a chance!" There was in his voice a note almost of admiration for the nerve they showed—the admiration of one intrepid soul for another of like calibre.

"You've got a game worth while, overhauling such fellows as that," I said, answering his tone rather than his words.

He turned his head, and looked at me queerly. "You ain't giving way to hero worship?" he inquired whimsically. "Well, maybe you're right. I'd rather get out and round up a bunch like that, than haze a sneak thief or a petty check raiser into the lockup, or serve a writ of attachment on some poor devil in debt. They're out for the coin, all right, all right; but it looks to me like their game is as much on the level as grafting off the public in politics. That ain't saying I'm going to put 'em up for church membership, though," he drawled, as an afterthought. "If I don't take 'em into camp, it'll be because they know a trick I ain't wise to." He sat humped over his rod, and joggled the bait temptingly up and down.

I studied him appreciatively. "I suppose you'll think me impertinent, but did it ever strike you they must have an accomplice in town—some one to keep them well posted?" I wanted to sound him upon that point without giving him a hint that I knew anything of the matter; I owed that much to Ellie.

"Sure, they keep posted! The bank's got a couple of men working the town end. Yuh see, Walter, I'm just sheriff. I'm not a detective, and it ain't my business to go still-hunting for possible accomplices. When a warrant's put into my hands to arrest a man, my business is to get out and round him up. The gum-shoe stunt ain't in my line. I'm after the Dry Ridge gang, hotfoot; but I'm not going around town hunting evidence about their source of information. Lord! My hands are full enough, as it is, just taking in the fellows they think they want to see in the court-room. I've got two regular deputies, besides my under sheriff; and we're all of us on the jump most of the time. I've got to make a trip to Butte, tonight, and bring in a man that's wanted for manslaughter. I know him—he's a bad actor—and I don't like to send a deputy after him; I've got to get him myself. Then there's a couple of bad-check men to round up, and—well, I don't just smoke good cigars and draw my salary! And I can't give up all my time to the Dry Ridgers; that's what my wife calls pick-up work—something to fill up my spare time. In a week or so, I expect to get out again after 'em." He landed another fine

perch, and seemed to forget everything else, for the time being. But when he went back to his old place on the bank, I tried him again, because I had promised the girl that I would see if her father had any particular theories on the subject.

"Doesn't it seem queer to you that they hang around so close without being seen and recognized?" I asked curiously. "What is your theory about that, Mr. Wellcome—if you don't mind telling me?"

"Well"—he applied another match to his cigar, which he had been neglecting somewhat—"uh course, there's several possible reasons for that. The gang may be perfectly familiar to a good many, and yet not be known *as* the gang—see? But, on top uh that, all the ranchers around that way—in the whole country, for that matter—are pretty well accounted for. They're most all men with families, earning a living straight out, with no mystery about their resources. They've all been pretty well investigated—on the quiet, uh course.

"Then, again, they may stay pretty close to their hangout, wherever that is, and not show up by daylight at all. Nobody's seen any strangers around in the country, as far as I could find out. Then they *might* live in town, the whole bunch. But if they do, they're sure smooth about getting out and in without leaving any clue behind 'em. They left town the other night, on horseback. That's certain, because they were seen leaving the alley behind the bank. There were only three, according to the fellow that jumped them up and gave the alarm. But there might have been more somewhere else; probably there were. Anyway, it's pretty certain they did ride out of town, and that they headed for Dry Ridge.

"They're sure cute—those same jaspers! This morning five different posses reported to me, and not one of them had seen a sign uh the bunch. Taken all together, I'll bet there ain't a piece uh ground big as a good-sized garden patch that hasn't been ridden over by some of my men."

"It certainly is strange," I said futilely.

"There's just one chance uh catching 'em," he volunteered. "They're liable to get too bold, some day, and swell-headed over their smartness. And when they do——" He nodded his head eloquently, and smiled. "Then it's—good-by—Dry—Ridge—gang!" He flipped his cigar end into the river; and I arose, for I heard Ray calling.

"I hope I may be there at the finish; I'd like a sight of them, just to see what real outlaws look like," I observed, and started off to see what Ray wanted.

The sheriff grunted, and rebaited his hook. "Chances are you'd find they didn't look any different from other jaspers," he said. "That's been my experience with bad men."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SILHOUETTE AGAIN.

Ray, it seemed, was not altogether subdued by his rough trip. He wanted me to ride into town with him and get "something cold and fizzy," as he put it. A cold bath, fresh clothes, and a shave had brightened him to his old lustre; and only a badly sunburned nose, that had begun to peel, gave evidence of his outlaw hunt.

"Got to see what the old town looks like," he said, and slapped me painfully upon the shoulder. "Never was so long in the wilderness before. Seems a month, old chap; but it was great fun—or would have been, if we had caught our men."

I smiled to myself at his assured air; that "our men" certainly made a hit with me! To see Ray really worked up over something that hadn't a flicker of skirts—in the background, at least—was a novelty. I glanced surreptitiously around in all the places where Ellie was likely to be, failed to see her, and told Ray I'd go with him. I suggested waiting until after dinner; but he said he knew a swell Dutch restaurant in town, and we'd eat there, and knock around town after-

ward, and maybe go to a show. What he wanted was a touch of civilization to wash down the wilderness, so to speak.

So, we had our horses saddled, and started off, Ray telling in great detail all the little adventures of the trip. His horse had slipped on a chalk-rock hill, it seems, and had gone down with him about twenty feet—I suppose it really was half that—and but for Steve he might have been killed, because he was caught under the horse, and it began to struggle immediately. Steve had slid down to him and helped him out. "Great chap—Steve," he commented briefly. "Make a dandy brother-in-law," he added, getting out his pipe and filling it as we rode along.

That remark hurt, coming as it did on top of my own disturbing observations. "Think there's much chance?" I asked, when I had made sure of the proper tone.

He eyed me for a minute, evidently displeased. "How the deuce can *I* tell —yet?" he demanded. "If I were certain——" He stopped to light up, and I was glad when his next words were upon a different subject.

So there *was* something doing between Steve and Ellie! I had felt, all along, that there was an undercurrent of deep feeling there; but, all the same, it was mighty disagreeable to have the suspicion confirmed. Ray was not much given, however, to discussing his sister and her affairs. I'm afraid he did not half appreciate her, for one reason.

None of them seemed to, for that matter. She was Ellie, and she was one of the family; and, as such, they felt an affection for her, and took her as a matter of course. But not one of the three seemed to think that she was not exactly like other girls of her age, or that she had any individuality at all, apart from her relationship with them.

I had noticed that all along; and now, because Ray drifted indifferently away from the subject, I was half resentful, although open discussion of it would have been painful. You know how it is when you have a bad bruise; you hate to touch it because it hurts very much, and at the same time you can't resist feeling it frequently. So it was that I felt toward any love affair between Ellie and Steve Johnson. I wanted to forget it, to ignore it; yet I craved details and Ray's opinion.

However, I let it go for that time, because Ray was telling about his attempts at cooking a meal over a camp fire, and how the coffeepot, set upon some twigs, upset and put out his fire completely, so that Steve had to start all over again; and how the bunch guyed him for a tenderfoot—he, who was born on the Big Bend ranch! By the time he had finished, we were in town, and Ray was hunting the coldest and fizziest—sampling several kinds in several places, to find one to his liking —and sustained conversation was out of the question, for the time being.

We ate dyspepsia-breeding stuff in the Dutch restaurant—a cool, tiled place, which would have done credit to an Eastern town twice as big as Porcupine—and had beer with it. Afterward, we sat and smoked in there; and when it was time, we went to a show —a thirty-cent show, of the sort where the leading lady played what actors call a "misery-cloak part," with the usual snowstorm as an accessory to the misery, and the leading man says: "Oh, why did she leave muh!" to sad music.

Ray thought it was great, and laughed systematically at all the pathos, and applauded the worst places; and I found it a good place to think—my mind revolving slowly the puzzle which Ellie had set herself to solve, and in which she had enlisted my interest and aid—the former, I am afraid, being much greater than the latter. I wanted very much to help her find the Dry Ridge gang; not that I cared particularly about running them down as a matter of justice, but because I hoped that it would command her respect, and, perhaps, pave the way for me to attain something better than mere respect. She had said she could love the man who hunted them down

—and I was anxious to put her to the test.

But, with two dozen men hunting Dry Ridge foot by foot, without success, and with the sheriff frankly owning himself not only puzzled, but beaten, for the time being, I could not see where we had much chance of solving the mystery. Two vagrant clues, I was forced to own, did not by any means spell success. She had her piece of saddle string, and I had my shadow—and of what use to us was either? It seemed to me rather absurd to hope for success. But she clung to her conviction that we had a chance—and I was not going to disappoint her, if I could help it. I sighed heavily, I know, when I thought of the task before us; but it happened to be a melancholy part of the play—one of the "Why did you leave muh" places—so Ray did not ask what was the matter. He merely grinned, and remarked: "Buck up, old man; they fall on each other's necks at the last curtain."

When we went out and were thinking of starting homeward, I had partly forgotten my discouraged mood, and was taking kindly to Ray's suggestion that we have a game of billiards first. We strolled along up the street, not yet quite decided whether it would be worth while, when I stopped as suddenly as if I had walked against a house in the dark.

We were passing a saloon at the time—one of those plate-glass-doored affairs, with an office inclosure immediately back of the palm-decorated vestibule. I had glanced in idly, as does one when walking aimlessly along the street; and I had seen distinctly, on the frosted glass of the office, the silhouette which I had remarked on the night of the bank robbery.

"What's the matter?" cried Ray, who had taken a step or two, and found that I was standing there staring into the saloon. "Want a drink *that* bad?"

I did not reply, though his words had brought me out of the trance into which I seemed to have fallen. I turned and rushed into the saloon, just barely catching myself back into some semblance of calm when I was inside the doors. I pulled myself together, went in, and up to the bar, mechanically pulling a letter from my pocket as I went.

"Do you mind if I address this, back in the office?" I asked the bartender.

"Sure not," he replied amiably, and I turned to that part of the room where I had seen the shadow. I had to round a corner to reach the door, because the office was just a glass-inclosed square, built in one corner of the barroom proper, with the door opening to the back. I whipped around that corner as if it were a matter of life and death that I should address that old envelope within one minute—and when I reached the door and went in, the office was empty!

I stared around incredulously. I even stooped and looked under the desk and behind the high waste basket; but the office was absolutely unoccupied by any save myself. I leaned my elbow on the desk, and studied the matter over; for I felt that it would hardly do to rush out again without stopping. When I had gone into the vestibule, the shadow had still been there. I could see it as plainly as I had seen it in the bank that night—a man's profile, stooping over the desk—a man with a hat on. When I went to the bar, I had turned my back toward the office, and the shadow did not show upon the glass on that side, as I had noticed particularly. This because a desk lamp in the office had thrown the shadow to the front. While I had stopped at the bar, the fellow must have left the office; but it was plain that he must still be in the saloon—unless he had gone out while I was in there looking for him!

With that fear, out I rushed again, in nearly as great a hurry as when I entered.

The room was a large one, with chairs and tables scattered comfortably about, and a billiard table at the far end. There must have been forty or fifty men in there; they all wore their hats, and were moving about and buzzing companionably. I began to see

that the fellow needn't leave the saloon to make himself hard to find; it was going to be puzzle enough with him there among the others.

Ray tackled me immediately, and pulled me into a quiet spot—to see if I were drunk, crazy, or just plain foolish, he said. "*You* didn't want to address any letter," he accused; and, to prove it, he took from my fingers the envelope which I was still holding. "Walter M. Tenny, Porcupine, Montana," he read aloud, and gave it back. "What's the game, old man?" he insisted. "You might tell a fellow what's up, and let me in on it. You know I never act so blamed mysterious with *you*."

I came near telling him the whole thing; indeed, but for my promise to Ellie, I should have done so. As it was, I put him off by saying that I had fancied I saw a man I knew, and wanted to make certain. Which was a very lame excuse, I will admit, for the way I had rushed about; and I couldn't blame Ray for putting up his chin and walking off in a miff.

I did not feel just like following him and making overtures for peace, because I felt that nothing except the truth would soften his mood; and that I did not feel free to give him. So I let him go out and light his pipe on the sidewalk, evidently in some doubt as to whether he should start home immediately or fool around in town for another hour. For myself, I was equally undecided. I ordered a cocktail, and felt rather abused by fate, in that I had lost my man of the shadow and had hurt Ray's feelings, into the bargain. I think I should have had a very unpleasant hour or two, if Steve Johnson had not sauntered up from the billiard table and greeted me like an old friend.

I felt that his coming was what was most needed, and led him out to where Ray still stood sulking on the edge of the pavement. With him for a buffer between us, we patched up a sort of limping discourse, and finally got our horses and rode off home together, with Ray gradually coming back to his old sunniness. He never did hold a grudge long, but he made up for it by being as nasty as possible while his temper did last.

As soon as he and Steve were well along in a subject which I was not bound to follow, I let my mind go back to the puzzle, and tried to think of some way in which I could locate my shadow man beyond all doubt. Silhouettes are rather deceiving things. While I could see the resemblance to some one I had met, even this second sight of it brought me no nearer to a positive identification. I had established just the one fact—that the fellow was still in town, and not out in the Dry Ridge country, as every one seemed to think.

Of course, I should tell Ellie about it; and perhaps she could see light where all was black to me. If we could only identify that man of the shadow! That, to me, seemed almost the final goal; for we should have one of the gang, then—and perhaps he would confess, or we could shadow him and find out who were the others. I began to feel very sure that the search should not be made in the Dry Ridge country, but nearer home.

I was so anxious to reach home before Ellie had gone to bed that I kept my horse half a length ahead of the others, who were inclined to loaf and enjoy the soft moonlight. As to what they were talking about, I haven't the faintest idea, so thoroughly immersed was I in my own speculations and hopes and plans; but I succeeded in hurrying their pace a bit, and in calling forth all manner of invectives from Ray. Steve seemed too easy-going and indifferent to mind whether he rode fast or slow, and kept pretty well alongside me, without protesting.

"If Tenny wants to burn the earth getting to his little bed, what's the odds?" he answered Ray once. "Suits me—I've been living a pretty swift life, this last week or so. I'm willing to bed down any old time. Come on, kid, and quit chewing the rag. Or lag behind, if you want to."

Ray did not want to, and came on,

grumbling; so we parted with Steve where the trails forked, and Ray put the spurs to his horse, out of pure contrariness, and we raced that last mile home.

Even with that, we were too late to find Ellie; and I had to carry my puzzle to bed with me, and to the very edge of my dreams. Even beyond—though it sounds terribly hackneyed—I was chasing shadows, and finally clapped a hand upon my man of the silhouette, to find that it was Ray—a dénouement which seemed very plausible in my dreams.

CHAPTER X.

I GO SHOPPING.

I hadn't a chance to talk privately with Ellie until after breakfast, though I must have looked extremely portentous; for she caught me playfully by the sleeve, when I had just risen from the table, and led me outside—to help feed the dogs, she said.

"Now—out with it, kind sir," she began unexpectedly, when we were beyond the hearing of the others. "You're fairly bursting with important information, if looks go for anything. I was really afraid to let you keep it bottled any longer, for fear something might happen. What is it?" She sat down upon the roof of Bannock's house, and eyed me expectantly while she crumbled dog biscuit.

I told her about seeing the shadow and failing to see the man who made it; and when I had told all the details, I was frank enough to confess myself stumped, and to ask her what we should do next.

She finished feeding the dogs, and then led the way down to that shady spot by the river—which was anything but shady in the morning, by the way, since it faced the east—and we sat down before she opened her lips to speak.

"So he's still in town," was her first comment. "H-m-m!" She looked away to Dry Ridge, the sun lighting her eyes. "Are you *sure* it was the same man?"

"I'd be willing to stake everything I possess on its being the same," I averred. "Chance brought him between the glass and the light, as he was in the bank. He was stooping over the desk—bending his head, I mean—and the pose was practically the same. He wore the same hat, as far as I could tell; and—well, I'd swear to his being the fellow I saw in the bank that night."

"And you couldn't pick him out of the crowd in the saloon, afterward?"

"No—you try it yourself, some time, if you think that's easy to do. Of course, if he'd had an unusual nose, or a pointed chin, or an abnormal profile in any way, I think I could spot him. But he hadn't; just a clean-cut, straight-featured silhouette, without any unusual points—there were probably a dozen men in there with the same general type of face. He was clean-shaven, however; and his hat appeared to be the Stetson which so many of these Western fellows wear. Ray has one about like it, and so has your father, and nearly every man I've met who rides at all."

"And you think you couldn't possibly recognize the man, if you saw him close and took notice?" She was beginning to look discouraged.

"Well—of course, I didn't go through the crowd looking for him. Ray came up, and wanted to know this and that; and I had to put him off and offend him. That rather broke up my search, you see. He went outside; and when Steve Johnson came along, we went out immediately to Ray, and came home. So I really didn't have a chance to look for the man, without making myself so conspicuous that I hesitated to do it. I didn't want to say anything until I had talked it over with you, you see."

She did not thank me for that indirect compliment, but she looked pleased; and I was content. I was hoping that all these little attentions would count with her; it was the only way in which I dared woo her. She studied

the matter for a time, plucking idly at the grass blades under her hand.

"He was in town last night; he will probably be in town to-day. I'll tell you, kind sir, what we will do. I had intended to take a ride over on the Ridge; but that can wait, for I think this is more urgent. At any rate, we know that one of the gang is in town, and we don't know that any of them are on the Ridge. We'll go to town, and you can look for him. Every man you see who answers the general description must come under your suspicion, and you must make sure of him before you pass him by. You must manage to get a good, close view of his profile, and study it until you are sure he is or is not the man. If you can't quite decide, you must consider him doubtful, and find out his name and occupation—if you don't already know. He will probably be loitering around in some cool place; for he's not likely to be working at anything, and this will be a scorching day, I think.

"I will pretend I'm shopping; and whenever we come to a group of men, or a saloon, which you want to investigate, I will stop in the nearest store and buy something, and you can pretend to be waiting for me. Do you see? It would look queer if we hadn't some excuse, you know. In a small place like this, every one knows us, and would notice things that would attract no attention in a city. Come, kind sir—let's start, right away. I'll have Chub hitch my Pansy Girl to the stanhope, and we'll drive, for a change."

She was a precipitate young woman, once she decided to do a thing. I stifled a sigh at her energetic haste, and followed her to the house, like the obedient servant who never questions or argues. I'm afraid she was coming to think I had no mind of my own, and to fancy that she could lead me about with a ribbon, like those fuzzy little toy dogs. But I was not ready to declare myself master of her and her destiny; so I tried to act and look the toy-dog part.

Ray had his father cornered in the porch, and was talking like a book agent about something, with a great waving of hands, and nodding of head, and exclaiming, with his pipe toward the old man; so we passed them by unnoticed, and declared our intentions to Mother Wellcome. She was beginning to look at us with knowing little half smiles about that time, by the way. We *were* a lot together, and always with something very private to talk about; and I suppose the old lady sized us up for a pair of ardent lovers, just about ripe for the engagement-ring business. Well, we were, as far as I was concerned! She gave Ellie several little commissions which fitted in very well with our plans; and as soon as might be, we started, Ellie driving quite as dexterously as she rode.

The sheriff liked good horses, I could see. All he had were fine animals, and this Pansy Girl was no exception. The turnout would have passed muster on Broadway, which was another peculiarity of the sheriff's possessions. Not often, in the small places, does one see that smartness and scrupulous attention to detail which one expects in a city.

Ellie herself might have been driving in Central Park, or some other good place, so far as looks went. She knew how to dress, once she deigned to walk in the path of fashionable attire. I leaned back and watched her contentedly. She had all my heart, and she pleased the critical eye; and whatever might have been called crude and Western in her dress and speech on ordinary occasions was quite gone, now. She was well groomed, well bred, and well pleased with her errand—all of which go far toward perfection, if you ask me.

Once in town, she held Pansy Girl rigidly to a walk—a high-stepping, arched-neck sort of walk, it is true; for Pansy Girl loved speed. She meant to give me opportunity to look well at every man we met or passed—and there were not many, at that hour of the day, except the honest toilers who

were digging water mains and laying sidewalk.

"I'm afraid we're a bit early," confessed Ellie, when the fact became clamorously emphatic.

It was one of those hot forenoons which promise scorching heat later in the day. The street sprinklers were on parade—much to the disgust of Pansy Girl, who insisted on giving them all the street—and men were flushing the pavement before their shops with garden hose. Of loiterers, strictly speaking, there were none.

I looked at Ellie; and she flushed a bit, and laughed.

"Oh, I'll own I was in too great a hurry, kind sir! We'll drive about in the park a bit, have a lunch in some cool place, and start in earnest directly after. I hate shopping, anyway; I never could live through a whole day of it."

"The stores look beautifully cool and quiet," I observed wickedly. "No crowd of bargain hunters to crush through——"

"They have an orange-ice sign out to-day, I see," she interrupted, when we passed the candy store opposite the robbed bank. "We'll try one; they make delicious orange ice."

We were just nicely seated, and had ordered the ice, and were feeling gloriously cool in the breeze of an electric fan, when a man passed by the window —Ellie had remembered our quest, and had chosen a table where we could look out upon the street—a man who might have been my shadow man. I sprang up, told her to wait a moment, and went out after him.

I think I trailed that fellow ten blocks before he brought up at a little paint shop, and went in. I sauntered past, as slowly as I dared, turned, and came back, glancing in casually at the open door. He was there, bending over a sample color book, and talking about what it would cost to paint his house. I stopped, gazed fascinatedly at a pyramid of canned mixed paints in the window, listened, and looked when I dared. It seemed a long while before he turned his head so as to bring his profile, sharply defined, toward me. I snorted, and went off profanely.

The man had a pronounced snub nose—a nose that, once seen, could never be mistaken for that of my shadow man. I hurried back through the heat, entered the candy store, and found Ellie resisting a rapidly melting orange ice before her, and staring disconsolately at the rising tide of yellowish water in our two dishes. She was waiting for me, bless her heart! And she never once complained, but sympathized with me, and thought it was a shame I had to go so far before I could make sure.

I ordered fresh dishes, and studiously refrained from looking at the passers-by, until the last spoonful was gone. After that, we drove in the park—a dusty, forlorn little driveway, built in oval form, with rows of young trees down the middle; the protecting crates rather detracting from the rural effect, and the shade a luxury to be enjoyed by future generations. We went around the oval nine times —I am sure of the number, because I counted every time we passed a certain rustic bench, where a young man and a young woman were trying to hide under a green silk parasol—and discussed gravely the shadow man and his probable relation to the rest of the Dry Ridge gang.

That, while edifying, important, and conducive to our own faith in our sagacity, did not help one whit toward locating our man. We realized this after the ninth round, and went back to Main Street, hoping that our quarry would be thirsty by this time, and that he was not still in bed in some obscure lodging house.

"I've heard that criminals—the town kind—are dreadfully lazy about getting up in the morning," sighed Ellie dejectedly. "Father arrested a man, once, who had broken into a hardware store and stolen six dozen pocketknives, a dozen safety razors, and three revolvers. He went to his room at two o'clock, and the man was still in bed." She manœuvred Pansy Girl

around another street sprinkler. "It really wasn't father's duty to arrest him—he just did it because he happened to have a suspicion of where the fellow was stopping, and went to see before he told the police where to look. Father is always doing little things like that—his own share, and more besides. But wasn't that lazy? In bed at two o'clock!"

I said that it was; though there have been times in my past life when I was guilty of the same misdemeanor. I cheered her somewhat by telling her that I did not believe "our" man was that sort, and that he would be knocking around somewhere soon after noon. It was nearly that already; so we went direct to a café, and managed to kill an hour or so before we got seriously down to the chase.

That afternoon stands out by itself in my memory, for never have I spent another like it. We left Pansy Girl at a stable, and walked. We would loiter along, apparently indifferent to our surroundings, until we approached a shady spot under an awning—the sort of place where idle men congregate on a hot afternoon. Then we would go more slowly; Ellie pretending to study the shop windows, while I covertly studied the men.

The first time I signaled her to halt —the signal was the dropping of my match safe—we were exactly opposite a little shoe-repairing hole in the wall. There was a saloon on each side; so all that she could do was to go into the little place and seem to want something. I kept her in there fifteen minutes while I searched both places of masculine refreshment, and she came out, looking flushed and glad to escape.

She confided to me, before we stopped again, that she had bought enough shoe laces to last a lifetime. She had made the old fellow wild by demanding a certain width of buckskin laces, undressed. "I don't suppose there *are* any such things," she sighed. "At least, he hadn't any; and he told me at last, quite bluntly, that I didn't know what I wanted, and not to bother him, because he had to earn a living for his family."

I took the little bundle of laces from her, and put it in my coat pocket; and we went on.

The next stop was nearer a hardware store than any other respectable place, and Ellie bought thumbscrews there. At any rate, that is what she called them; she said they were suggested by her feelings toward our shadow man. I pocketed them, soothed her, and encouraged her all I could; and we proceeded up the street.

My part of the undertaking was quite as harrowing, because whenever I went into a saloon I felt constrained to buy something to excuse my entrance, and I was accumulating more brands of cigars than I would have believed existed. Also, my pockets were beginning to sag conspicuously, and to bulge so that I could not hold my hands down straight by my sides. I suggested that she buy a suit case next; and, though she laughed at me, when she emerged from the next place—a harness shop—she flaunted a gayly beaded buckskin bag of near-Indian make; a bag that would hold—and that did hold, before we were through with that afternoon—a good peck of stuff.

By four o'clock that afternoon, we had exhausted the possibilities of all the business portion of town except one little back street, that seemed to hold nothing but scrappy back yards, a smelly corral, and a livery stable. Ellie was heat flushed, tired, and discouraged; she had begun to be snappy, and to hint that I hadn't *seen* any man's profile shadowed on any glass anywhere, and that she didn't care if I had.

I had a list of fifteen "doubtfuls" to hunt down more particularly, all my pockets full of cigars, and a bad taste in my mouth. Besides, the near-Indian bag was heavy, and lumpy with the impromptu purchases of Ellie, who had bought without thinking much of the bulk of the article. Somewhere in the depths of the bag, a dollar alarm clock ticked like an infernal machine; and

something else had gone soft and was making an unsightly, greasy spot on the buckskin side, just where an amazing flower stopped short and left a clear space. Ellie informed me crossly that the spot was made by a pound of pork sausage, and that I was to blame for halting her right in front of that nasty little meat shop. We turned unhappily back toward Main Street, nearer quarreling than I should have believed possible under any circumstances.

There, just as we turned the corner, we met Ray; Ray, glorified by joy and a fresh lot of summer clothes. The joy, we speedily discovered, was born of the new horse he was riding—a magnificent animal, with a coat that shone like gold, and mane and tail that crinkled and waved like silver.

Ellie gave a little gasp when she saw him. "Ray Wellcome, what are you doing with that horse?" she demanded, in a tone as near belligerence as the heat would permit.

"Taking him home," Ray grinned. "He's *mine,* y' know. Has been for a whole hour. Dad bought him for me this afternoon. Good old dad—ain't he a peach, Walter?" He meant the horse, I think. I declared that he was a beauty, and that Ray was a lucky chap; and he cantered off, smiling, and proud as—as I should have been, in his shoes.

Ellie stood still on the corner, and stared after him. "That shows who's father's favorite," she remarked petulantly. "Two months ago I almost went on my knees to father, I wanted that horse so badly. He gave me a lecture on economy for my pains, and insisted that he couldn't afford to buy him. That, kind sir, is Goldilocks, a Kentucky-bred horse, with a pedigree and speed enough, almost, to put him on the race track, and gentle enough for any one to ride. His owner wanted three hundred and seventy-five dollars for him, two months ago—and I heard he'd gone up another twenty-five, just lately. Oh, I *did* want that horse!"

She blinked back some tears then, I am sure; and I felt awkward, and an idiot, because I could not think of anything comforting to say to her. I knew that it would mean a great deal to her to own that horse; because she loved horses, and understood them well.

To Ray, even Goldilocks would mean simply a fine-looking horse to ride and make a show upon—nothing more. A horse was just a horse to him. He would tire of Goldilocks as soon as he saw some other which he fancied more; and then—I conceived the wild notion of quietly biding my time until the novelty had worn off his new treasure, and then buying the horse for Ellie—and I felt that any price would be cheap, if it brought her pleasure.

We went home, after that—a bit downcast, because we had learned nothing, and were tired, and because Ellie could not seem to feel philosophic over Goldilocks just then. We did not even see any humor in our weird assortment of "junk" in the beaded bag, though I venture to say that there were not half a dozen articles which would be of the slightest use to either of us.

The climax came when Mother Wellcome met us and asked for her thread and the two spools of brown darning cotton which Ellie was to get for her.

"I—I don't know—I suppose it's in there," stammered Ellie, pointing uncertainly toward me and the bag. "Hunt it up, will you, kind sir?"

I hunted. I began by putting my hand in, and feeling gingerly around among the packages, and always coming in contact with the pork sausage, which had gone soft and oozy; I ended by dumping the whole batch on the floor of the porch, and going down on my knees to it.

"For—con-science'—*sake!*" It was Mother Wellcome, standing over me, half horrified, utterly bewildered. I looked up at her apologetically. I had the alarm clock in one hand, and the pork sausage in the other—I was determined to get rid of those two things at once—and I observed weakly that I did not seem to find any thread.

Ellie stood beside her mother, and stared down at me, caught her breath,

gave a little hysterical shriek that had in it both laughter and tears, and fled up the stairs, leaving me there to face it out with the old lady, as best I could.

On the whole, I think I pulled the two of us out of it very creditably. I said that it was a new fad in the East, and that Miss Wellcome had wanted to try it. The game consisted of going downtown, shopping for two hours, and always buying the thing your eyes lighted upon first; with a precautionary limit of five dollars on the price, and five pounds on the weight, and five—feet, I think I told her—on the bulk. The aggregation was to be brought home and put into what is called a crazy cabinet, the joke appearing in the varied assortment of articles.

I don't know whether she really believed me. She took some time to consider it and to size up the layout; and, during the interval of stunned silence, I made my exit.

CHAPTER XI.

RAY'S AFFAIRS.

I arose next morning to a strained atmosphere. I'm afraid I did not—and still do not—consider of great importance anything pertaining strictly to others; for I am a self-centred brute, as most of us are, when all's said. This concerns Ray; I came upon the thing by accident, overhearing a few hot words between him and his father.

I think that Ray made the mistake of thinking that, because he had persuaded "dad" to buy him a four-hundred-dollar horse which caught his fancy, his father would be equally pliable in other matters. He had never, I suppose, located that streak of hard rock in the old man's nature, and did not even know that it was there.

I was standing upon the porch, looking speculatively at Dry Ridge in the distance, and thinking mostly of Ellie, when I became aware that the sheriff was at home, and was speaking in a tone which I had never, until then, heard him use. It was the harsh, grating, dominating way in which I could imagine him addressing a refractory criminal.

"Don't yuh let me hear another word about it!" he said. "I've told yuh what I've got to say on that subject. Why, damn yuh, I'd turn yuh out, and let yuh rustle for yourself, of yuh done such a crazy thing! As for pungling up five thousand dollars to set yuh up—huh!"

I turned so short that my heel made a rough spot on the porch floor. I though that he was speaking to my pretty maid; and, even if he was her father, I meant to have a say. But, to my astonishment, it was Ray's voice which answered—Ray, surprised, puzzled, and a bit irritated by this blank wall of refusal where he had never before been denied a thing.

"But, dad, what's the reason? You expect me to marry and settle down *some time*, don't you? And you don't want me to marry some one I don't want, just for money. You've stated your views to me on that subject often enough. Florence is a good girl, and you know her and her family. You're friendly with them. You know their past, present, and future, as well as any man can. You knew her mother. There isn't a thing you can bring up against any of the family, is there?" His tone challenged, and he waited a moment.

"Lord knows I had hard enough work getting her to say yes!" he went on ruefully, when the sheriff kept silence. "It was only last night that I got her fairly cornered, and she owned up she likes me. I've been pretty much a fool over girls, dad. But this time—dad, you know how you felt about mother, I suppose! And I don't believe you ever in your life cared for her like I care for Florence Johnson. I want to marry her. I'll settle down here—anywhere—and work, and I'll pay you back. I don't ask you to *give* me one dollar. If you won't lend me any"—he was growing indignant, now—"why, I'll borrow it from some one else. I'm of age, and——"

"Oh, hell!" interrupted the sheriff. "It ain't the money. I'd rather see you *dead* than married to that girl!"

During the interval of silence which followed—like the dead blank after an explosion, it was—I came to myself, and walked off. I don't know what happened; I don't suppose there was anything, much, after that remarkable assertion.

They came to the breakfast table sullen-faced, both of them. I could see that neither had given in, and that there were all the ingredients of a large-sized family rupture gathered round that white linen of Mother Wellcome's. Evidently she knew something of the trouble; for her eyes were moist and sympathetic whenever she looked at Ray, which she did often. They met her husband's eyes anxiously, and a bit timidly, I thought; and I pitied her for her absolute helplessness in the matter. Ellie seemed to be mentally remote from it all, like a brooding goddess—if you will permit me to be sentimental. I knew that she was busily revolving the mystery, and trying to invent some new scheme of detection; and so my mind was at ease, so far as she was concerned. I tried to bridge the harrowing gaps in the conversation, but I felt that my success was doubtful, though Mother Wellcome glanced at me gratefully once or twice.

After breakfast, Ray asked me to go for a ride with him—in much the same manner in which he would attempt his first hold-up. I thought I knew about what he wanted—a general unburdening of his heart, and my counsel and sympathy—so I did not hesitate a second, even in the face of a great desire to talk things over with Ellie.

"Walter, will you lend me five thousand dollars?" Ray began bluntly, when we were no more than outside the gate.

"Surely I will. Ten thousand, if you say so," I returned blithely. There was no particular generosity about that; for all my life thousands have been plenty, and with always more behind. And I am not a real spendthrift; so they kept piling up.

"Thanks, old chap. I knew you'd say that." But he did not smile, and I knew his hurt went beyond being cured by money.

"Walter, I'm going to get married," he said next, getting out that big pipe of his, which I knew for the signal of the unburdening process. "Dad's on the rampage about it, and won't give me a sou to set up housekeeping on. That's why I had to strike you. I wouldn't take a cent from him, now, after what——"

"Never mind telling me," I cut in, to save him going over it. "I was on the porch, and heard enough to understand the case—except his reason. That is still beyond me."

"Reason!" exploded Ray hotly. "He hasn't any reason. When I put it up to him, he couldn't name one. He's just got his neck bowed, and won't unbend it. I think he's taking it out of the rest of us because he couldn't run in the Dry Ridge gang. He's been sore at the world ever since, seems to me."

"He got you that horse," I reminded him.

Ray looked down at the crimply mane, and came near snorting. "Oh, yes—he bought me the horse—but I wish to thunder now he hadn't! Not if he's going to buck against my marrying Florence. I've a good mind to turn the old skate out. *I* don't want him."

"Sell him to me, then," I suggested. "I'll give you five hundred dollars for him, if you like."

Ray looked at me quickly, hesitated, and then smiled for the first time that morning. "He's yours, Walter. Get off, and we'll swap saddles!" Which made me think of his precipitate sister. "You see, old chap," he went on, when he had made good his bluff and dismounted, "I'm dead sore at dad. I'd like to just hand him back the money he paid for Goldilocks—and I want to buy Florence a ring. I don't want to pay for it with borrowed money, either!"

I liked Ray better after that sentence, I think, than ever before. I

had always felt that he was a man under his little vanities, and this proof, coming unexpectedly as it did, made me feel as if I had discovered a diamond in a bag of red-and-white confetti.

We changed saddles gravely, as if it were an everyday matter; and before I mounted Goldilocks, I took out my pocket check book and fountain pen, and wrote Ray a check. His face lightened considerably when he had it folded and in his pocket, and I knew that he felt almost quits with that obdurate father of his.

"I can't see what's got into dad all of a sudden," he observed, more equably, as we rode on toward town. "He never acted this way with me before; once, when I was going to marry a little waitress in the Home Dairy, down here—cute little yellow-haired girl—he didn't make much fuss. I was only eighteen, too, and dead crazy to lead her to the altar. Dad just laughed me out of it. 'When you're of age and know who you want, go ahead,' he told me then. Doesn't sound much like what he said this morning!

"And what gets me is, Florence is just the kind of girl you'd think he would pick out for me, himself. No nonsense about her, Walter—no frills and little affectations; she's just a nice, sensible——" He caught himself back from rhapsodizing, and looked at me foolishly. "Oh, I know how I've always gone on about girls," he apologized. "But Florence is different. She's the kind of girl you want to marry, and take care of, and have with you all your life. Mother likes her—she told me so. She said she could feel as if Florence were a real daughter of hers. She doesn't know why dad's so set against it, either. She says she never has heard a whisper against the girl. Dad's——" He stopped, and seemed to ponder what he would say.

"You see, Walter, dad has worked like a horse all his life, getting the ranch in shape—and then at this sheriff business. He's never had a real vacation, that I know of, in his life. I believe the work and worry are beginning to tell on him. Mother says he's on the go all the time, and never thinks of taking it easy and letting his deputies do some of the rough work. If there's anything hard, mother says, he always gets out and does it himself, and gives the deputies all the snaps. It was like that on this last trip. Dad was in the blankets last, and up first; and when we were hunting over the country, he was always in the lead—I never saw any man hit the pace he did. Seemed like the rest of us just tagged around, like a lot of kids, and fussed over the heat and the trails, while dad went ahead and said nothing. Maybe," he finished hopefully, "I struck him the wrong time. When he sees I mean business and can't be bluffed, he'll come around all right."

"Perhaps he merely hates to see you get married and go for yourself," I hazarded. I thought that I could understand to a certain degree the attitude of the sheriff, though his harshness did seem uncalled for. Probably, in view of the fact that he had never before denied Ray anything, he felt that he needed to bolster his disapproval with a great show of anger, for fear of weakening. He would hate to see Ray marry and leave home, just on the heels of his school being finished—when he had, no doubt, expected to keep him at home for a while. I did not believe that it was any dislike he could have for Florence, and I told Ray so. Which pleased and cheered him immensely.

I believe that Ray stopped in town only long enough to choose a ring. I know he gave me the slip, for half an hour or so, and then hunted me up—I was engaged in staring at men's profiles on the street—and asked me if I were ready to start home. Since I was there at his pleasure, I told him to lead out; and we headed out of town at a gait which only dire disaster, or an engagement ring burning in a young man's pocket, would justify.

I was not in the least surprised when he pulled up at the fork in the road, and observed sheepishly that he thought he might as well jog around

toward Johnson's, and would I think him a piker if he left me?

While we stood there and I held foolish, burlesque argument with him over his unforgivable desertion, Wellcome himself rode up to us, on the trail from the ranch. Ray was just turning laughingly into the Johnson trail, when the sheriff reached us; and no explanation of his intention was necessary.

He looked in a bad humor, did the sheriff. The twinkle was gone from his eyes, and his face had that set, hard look which can come to the face of a man with much flesh. Mentally, I backed from the scene which I felt was coming, but Ray seemed to be glad of the encounter.

"Hello, dad!" he greeted him cheerfully, and rode back to the fork again, so as to come within reach of him. "I sold Goldilocks to Walter, and here's your money. Thank you all the same, dad, for buying him for me—but I made up my mind I don't want him any longer. He—his gait doesn't just suit me, after all." Ray, foolish as any spoiled only son, seemed to think tact superfluous when he was dealing with his own father; but he did add that last sentence in recognition of what he saw in the sheriff's face.

Wellcome glanced at me; and I took the hint, and said I must be getting on. I left them to squabble it out undisturbed; for I knew that Ray could hold his own with the sheriff, if any man could, and that he stood a fair chance of winning out. He had that idolatry of the old man's to back him up, you see; though I don't believe he knew it.

I looked back once, and saw them there, Ray waving his hand energetically, his father sitting grim and quiet in the saddle, listening. I don't know why I should have felt uneasy, but I did; and I was vastly relieved when Ray galloped up and overtook me, just as I was swinging the gate open.

He was white, and determined, and more like his father than I would have believed he could look; and his breath came feverishly from his half-opened lips. I braced myself for something.

"Can you let me have that money right away, Walter?" he asked me, his voice shaking with excitement and rage suppressed. "Dad's gone too far with this. I'm going to take my traps off his damned ranch and stop in town—until I'm married. That won't be long—to-morrow, if I live."

"Aren't you a little bit hasty?" I tried to calm him. "Your mother and sister——"

"This has got nothing to do with them," he said shortly, sliding out of the saddle. "This lies between me and dad. He—he ordered me home! He said he'd thrash me if he caught me going to Johnson's! I'm a man. Do you think I'll stand for that?"

"If you go," I said, with secret reluctance, "of course, I shall go with you." Truly, I did not like the idea of leaving Ellie.

"I won't have you," he retorted bluntly. "This lies between us two, I tell you. Dad wouldn't want you to pull out—you'd better stay here for a while, anyway. I'm going alone. I won't drag *anybody* into this. It—it would be harder for mother—and Ellie, if you pulled out with me."

He had me there, and I half suspect that he knew it. I don't suppose that his own love affair had made him quite blind toward mine, though he would never mention it unless I opened the way. I said no more about going with him, except to engineer the financial side of it; though I felt pretty blue at the way things had come about. One never does enjoy standing by and watching an upheaval in a family, and, apart from my friendship with Ray, I was beginning to feel as if these were my people.

He was gone before his father returned, and he had taken all his personal effects, to show that he was in deadly earnest. But such is the reticence of some families about their inner troubles that no one mentioned the affair to me; not even Ellie, though her eyelids were pink—as were her mother's—when she came to dinner. The sheriff never spoke to a soul all through that horrible meal.

CHAPTER XII.

MOONLIGHT AND MIDNIGHT.

We separated afterward, and I saw no more of the family until morning; for I hated to intrude upon their trouble. I went to my room, and sat by the window, and watched the moon come up like a gilded tub. I tried to think of my own affairs, and to put the Wellcome complications aside, as not concerning me. I had done all I could for Ray—all that he would let me do—and I knew that he was quite capable of attending to his own affairs, from now on. He had made the turn which comes always to youth; and I felt that he had turned in the right direction, and put off his irresponsible idleness and vanities, as he would discard a masquerade costume when the dance was done. He was ready to meet life seriously, now; and I told myself, over and over, that it was probably the best thing that could happen to him.

Indeed, I more than half suspected it to be a test which the shrewd old sheriff had put upon the boy, just to see what sort of stuff there was in him. He was perfectly able to do it, and to carry it through to the end, if he took the notion. I had learned that much about the man. There was nothing weak in his nature, however much of "bull-headedness" there might be. He would probably lie low, now, and see what Ray would do, before making any move toward reconciliation. I inclined the more to this theory because the sheriff seemed not to hold any grudge against me for the help I had given Ray, but treated me exactly as before, except that he was gloomy and inclined to silence—a mood which was general, and not directed toward me in particular.

I went to bed when I had settled the matter to my own satisfaction, and I felt inclined to smile at the heroic methods of the sheriff to bring Ray up against the best part of himself. I told myself that, if Ellie should mention the affair to me, I would tell her my solution of her father's mysterious rage. She could tell her mother, if she liked; and the whole thing would soon be merely a practical joke on Ray.

But next day my pretty maid did not seek me out for sympathy. It seemed to me that she purposely kept herself aloof, and stayed with her mother in the sewing room, because she knew that was one place where I did not feel at home.

I went, as soon as might be, down to our shady spot by the river, and tried Wellcome's method of fishing. But that is pretty tame sport to a fellow who has ever whipped a trout stream; and an hour of dangling legs and bobbing bait, with the interlude of pulling a fish out of the water "by main strength and awkwardness"—none of the gamy "playing," when you have thrills of uncertainty over the outcome of the struggle, and each fish landed is a victory by itself—an hour of it, I say, was enough to last me a lifetime. Ellie did not come near me, either; and I felt aggrieved, and tempted to join Ray in his bachelor life in town, whether he wanted me or not.

I had managed, the night before, to inform her that Goldilocks had passed to my possession; but she did not seem particularly interested.

"Oh, Ray sold him to you, did he?" she had commented absently, and did not speak another syllable during the five minutes I had alone with her.

So one may imagine how gratefully I accepted, without much thought of the eeriness of it, her proposition, that evening, that we should ride down into Big Bend when the moon came up.

"It's just the night we have been waiting for," she said, looking out into the soft darkness from the porch—the favorite meeting ground of the family during the warm weather. "It's going to be just cool enough for pleasant riding—and I shall certainly go crazy if I don't get out of this atmosphere—out where I can breathe once more!"

I knew what she meant by the "atmosphere." The house had surely felt as if there had been a funeral there the day before—as if the scent of the flowers on the casket, and the hymns of

the singers, still hovered, ghostlike, in the rooms. Ray at home had been just one of the lot; and I, for one, had not paid much attention to his coming and going, being all taken up with my own affairs; but Ray gone in anger had become the axis around which all our thoughts revolved. Personally, I'd have been mighty glad to see him and his gay socks and ties, and his big pipe sagging down one corner of his handsome mouth, in their usual place in the family.

"You'll go, won't you, kind sir?" she asked, after a little space, when we were both moodily thinking.

"To be sure—if you will ride Goldilocks," I said rashly.

She did not move a muscle, I am sure—and yet I could feel the mental drawing away from me. "Oh, thank you—but I never ride any horse but my own," she said coolly.

I had sense enough to drop the matter with a simple "Pardon me." But, if she had struck me in the face, I'm sure I should not have felt more crestfallen and at a loss for words.

She was a sensible girl, however; and I think she understood that it was only a blunder, and forgave me. At any rate, she graciously overlooked it, after that single quelling sentence. She did not even ask me why I did not ride Goldilocks; for I left him in his stall, and took, instead, the horse which had been set apart for my use since my arrival at the ranch.

Chub, the man who attended to the stable, seemed never to be about the place after dark came; so I saddled Ellie's horse and mine, and we started without any one knowing of our ride. The sheriff was away again—his visits at home were always brief and uncertain—and Mother Wellcome had gone upstairs for the night.

I did not realize how late it really was, until Ellie had looked at her watch in the moonlight and gave a little laugh. "The romantic hour for an unusual expedition, kind sir," she said brightly. "It's half-past ten, this minute. If we don't ride too fast, we can see how the Bend looks at midnight."

"If it's as bad as in the daytime, you won't want to stop long," I said, remembering my distaste for the place.

"It will be worse—much worse. It will be delightfully spooky." She seemed to have thrown off her depression when she mounted her horse. She led the way up over the hill which shut off the real Bend from the ranch itself, and leaned from the saddle, before I could forestall her, and opened the gate; then she rode through, waited for me, and closed and fastened it behind us. She was one of those independent young women who do things without waiting for a man's services. All her life, I suppose, she had been accustomed to riding alone and opening gates for herself; and she thought nothing of it.

We went slowly down the lighted slope toward the shadows. "I hope we'll meet something, if it's only a bobcat," said my pretty maid. "You brought that funny bullet pusher, I hope."

"I did; and, if necessary, it can push a bullet to the required spot," I retorted. No one seemed to take seriously my new automatic gun. "I hope," I added pointedly, "we won't meet anything bigger than a bobcat."

She laughed; and we rode into the shaded hollow, where black, distorted shapes stood all about us, and seemed brazenly to deny that they were only rocks and bushes. After half a mile or so, I observed that she kept her horse close to mine. A little farther, and she frankly owned her timidity.

"It is awfully comfy to have a man along, kind sir," she told me demurely. "I wonder if the leader of the Dry Ridge gang feels shivery when he's out in the dark among the hills. I—I hope we *don't* meet a bobcat!"

I think it was one of those animals which squalled, immediately afterward, in the woods to our right, close enough to make our horses start and give little snorts of distrust.

Ellie reined close, and looked at me a bit anxiously. "They really won't hurt, you know," she remarked argumentatively. "And I'm glad we came,

kind sir. Any real emotion is better than just drowsing through life. I rather enjoy even feeling shivery. It —it's so stimulating!"

If that were true, she must have been greatly stimulated during the next hour or so. We rode slowly and, for the most part, silently. We crossed bright places where every stick and stone stood out sharply, whitened unnaturally in the moonlight. We plunged into black hollows where we could barely see the nearest objects, and where we must trust, more or less, to our horses to find a way out. At first, I had suggested taking a more open trail and turning back soon; but she had insisted that she wanted to go to the very end, and by the "spookiest" trail. So, I thought that I would just let her have her fill of shivers, and deliberately turned down in the direction of the sand dunes, white like piled bones, and with trees standing knee deep and whispering together. We rode in among them, looking furtively about us—I as well as Ellie—though, logically, there could be no danger. No one traveled that way, unless occasional need came to round up the sheriff's cattle, which ranged there in the wild.

On three sides, I knew, we were hemmed in by the river—a steep-walled river, wide, and deep, and swift of current—an ugly boundary for any man to cross. To the north of us lay the Big Bend ranch, and the trail from town ended at the ranch corrals. No one would come down here; no one had any occasion to come; and there was no likelihood of any one being as foolishly inclined as ourselves, that they should ride through the bend for pleasure. And, as to wild animals, there were deer, so Ray had told me, and coyotes, and wildcats—"bobcats" they were colloquially called—and perhaps a gray wolf or two.

No, there was no danger. It was the eeriness of the sand dunes, always shifting, and of the trees, always whispering, and of the rocky little hollows, always empty and forlorn, that gave me a creepy sensation. After we had gone a long way—I think we had nearly reached the end, and would soon have seen the river—my pretty maid looked again at her watch.

"'Tis the witching hour, kind sir. Pull up here in the shade of these rocks, and let's just stand a few minutes and enjoy the ghosts. Or, no—let's ride over there to the edge of those dunes. They look like graves, don't they? Do you suppose a spectre will rise from among them, if we wait long enough—a wraith with——"

We had gone on and stopped beside a big, gray rock, that seemed to break the tide of shifting white sand, and to pile it in long ridges upon either side. Ellie had been speaking in a very low tone—the place and the hour impelled one almost to whisper—and so the sound which came to us unexpectedly was magnified by the very silence of the place. We both started, and I could feel the shrinking of my horse. We looked at each other speechlessly; then I laughed inwardly.

"Do the Big Bend ghosts sneeze?" I whispered to the girl.

"It wasn't that, was it?" she whispered back, staring fearfully in the direction whence the noise had come.

I nodded emphatically, though I was not quite sure. It had sounded amazingly like a sneeze—one of those irresistible convulsions which sometimes seize a man without warning. We waited, standing there in the edge of the shadow cast by the rock.

"It couldn't be a sneeze; how could it?" argued my pretty maid, still whispering. "Who could be down here at midnight? Father's away, and Ray—and Chub went to town directly after he had eaten his supper. The cook told me he had gone; and, besides, I saw him ride off. Let's go over that way, and see——" Pluckily she started, and I was not far behind; I don't think either of us could justly be called a coward, even though the time and the locality had a certain influence upon our—nerves, let me say.

We had gone a rod, perhaps, when there came a shot, and the whine of a bullet over our heads. I know a little about guns, and I felt sure that the bul-

let came from one of those big six-shooters so popular in the West—a forty-four, I suspected. It lacked the sharp crack of a rifle, and it was not the booming explosion of—why, of course, it wasn't a shotgun! The bullet proved that, and we certainly heard that lump of lead hum.

We pulled up together, so short that our horses nearly came back on their haunches. Instinctively, then, I reined in ahead of the girl—having some idea, I suppose, of protecting her. There was another shot, and that time the leaden song was sung almost in our ears, so close came the bullet.

I drew my own gun, and would have ridden forward and had it out with the scamp who was using us for a target; but Ellie reached across and caught my arm.

"Don't!" she pleaded breathlessly. "What's the use? Come home with me. We haven't anything to fight about—come on!" She wheeled her horse, struck her spurs home, and went galloping off through the trees. And I followed; for I was not burning with fighting fever, and I did not want to lose her among those dunes. We galloped in and out, climbing steadily to higher ground, until we were well away from the place. Then we drew down to a walk, and breathed more freely.

"Now, who do you suppose that was, and what did he want to take a shot at us for?" I demanded, speaking to myself more than to the girl.

She shook her head, and led the way to the upper trail. "I think I should prefer to work out this puzzle at home," she said, when we were well out in the moonlight. "I feel very much like a mere woman, right now—a very scared one, at that." She set off at a sharp gallop, and neither of us spoke until the gate at the top of the hill stood out sharply before us. She rode ahead, stopped, swung the gate open as before, let me through, and closed it after us.

Then she turned in the saddle, and stared back down the hill into the Bend. "Kind sir, if we knew just what is down there among those dunes, and just who that was, and why he shot at us"—she turned again to the front, and laughed grimly—"why, then, we'd be wiser than we are, wouldn't we?"

"I hope so," I retorted dryly. The more I thought of it, the more I felt a dull rage that any one should shoot at me and at my pretty maid; and that I should ride off and let it go at that, instead of taking issue with him then and there.

She laughed again. She could afford to, now; for the house lay in sight before us, and whatever danger there had been for us lay beyond the gate we had passed through. "Well, we didn't meet a bobcat; but we had an adventure, just the same. Do you know, I never heard a bullet sing before—not in my direction. I know what the sound is like, now. Wasn't it funny?"

"That," I said stiffly, still busy calling myself names, "depends upon the point of view."

"*I* think it was funny," she reiterated cheerfully. "I was scared stiff at the time; but, now, I don't mind in the least. It would have been horrid if we had taken that trip and had nothing happen—wouldn't it, kind sir?"

"I think we might have borne the disappointment," I told her.

She said nothing more until we were at the corral and had dismounted. Then she came to where I was loosening the latigo, and perked her head upon one side, looking quizzically up at me. "Sometimes it's convenient, kind sir, to be a girl. One doesn't feel any responsibility, then, over one's record for bravery. As a woman, I can enjoy the adventure, without feeling that I should have played the hero and plunged boldly into the dark after that fellow, taking the risk of getting shot, and knowing that I had no show of catching him, just to demonstrate that I was not afraid. It must be awfully tiresome to be a man."

I came near taking her in my arms, then, and thanking her with kisses; but I did not quite dare bring our friendship to the test just yet. I did, however, put my hands upon her shoulders

and give her a gentle shake. "Pretty maid, why aren't all girls like you?" I asked, and let her go.

"No sane girl would have seen any sense in going after that fellow," she told me, backing off a bit consciously, I fancied. "He was in the dark, and had all the advantage of knowing exactly where you were, and of being prepared for any move you might make. He could have killed us both, if he had wanted to, I'm sure. He shot over our heads just as a polite hint for us to move on. He——"

"His politeness might be considerably improved," I observed meaningly.

"Perhaps—but that was not the time to give him a lesson. Be good, kind sir, and look at it the way I do—as an adventure which went very well with those sand dunes, and the moonlight, and midnight. It was just the bit of spice needed to make our ride picturesquely perfect."

"Being a man, I can scarcely enter into the proper spirit," I answered, closing the stable door upon our horses, and leading the way to the house. "I can't forget that he might have hit you—and whether he did it intentionally or not would have made no difference in the result. Any man who would shoot toward a woman——"

"But how could he know it was a woman?" She defended her marauder stoutly. "We weren't in bright light. I don't suppose he saw more than the indistinct shape of us and our horses. I'm sure he did not guess there was a woman—and that's why I enjoy the sensation all the more!"

I could not combat so determined an effort to make a pleasure out of the affair; so I bade her good night, and left her at the head of the stairs, still smiling over her "picturesque" ride.

CHAPTER XIII.

A HUNT FOR A CLUE.

I did not sleep at all, that night. I had been reared in the East—where shots are fired, it is true, but where they are not received calmly as a mere incident in one's ride. Ellie Wellcome was a woman, and as inconsistent as all her sex, in spite of her very clear reasoning powers. She might be quite sincere in her attitude of amused appreciation toward those shots; she might call them spice, if she liked. For my part, I took the thing more seriously.

That any one should be in hiding on Sheriff Wellcome's own land—and some one must have been hiding in the Bend, and suspicious of our presence there in the night—seemed preposterous to me, at first. I smoked two cigarettes by the window before I was ready to admit the plausibility of the thing. Then it seemed to me that I hit upon the one possible explanation.

There was the Dry Ridge gang—cunning, bolder than most, always disappearing mysteriously somewhere on the ridge. Might it not be possible for them to cross the river and hide in the Bend until the hue and cry was ended, for the time being? If they could cross the river, I thought the idea feasible. The Bend was big enough, and secluded enough, in all conscience. No one but the Wellcomes ever went into it, and they passed the gate at the top of the hill but seldom. I do not suppose the sheriff himself rode in there once a year. There was no occasion—except, as I have said before, when they wanted to round up the cattle which ran wild back there. The horses, except a few unbroken bronchos, were kept in a large field at the opening of the loop, down next the river toward Johnson's ranch.

It would be a bold stroke, indeed, if the Dry Ridge gang chose for their period of seclusion the great loop owned by the sheriff himself; if they hid safely upon his own land while he scoured, without result, the country across the river. No one would ever dream of searching the Bend. In the daytime, when Ray and I had ridden idly through there before, they could easily keep at a distance without being seen. At night, riding quietly as we had been, we had probably stumbled unexpectedly upon one of the lot. Lucky for us, if that were true, that

he contented himself with merely scaring us off!

If it were one of the gang, I mused, what would be their next move? Would they dare stay in there, now, after firing a shot and so betraying, in a measure, their presence? A few posses were still out in the Dry Ridge country, I knew, scouting about on the chance of running across some important sign of the outlaws. They would hardly risk going over there at once and taking a chance with the posses. At the same time, it would be a risk to stay in the Bend, it seemed to me, unless——

Right there, I dropped my cigarette. The chance that the man who fired upon us had followed, and so learned our identity, seemed to be almost a certainty. If I had been in his place, I should have done that very thing. I might have fired in the first surprise of being approached; but, afterward, when the intruders had started off, I should certainly have followed them and found out who they were. And I felt sure that, for cunning, the Dry Ridge gang was a thousand miles ahead of my dull wits.

Looking at the matter from that point, I could not flatter myself that the gang would feel greatly alarmed when they knew who had disturbed them. Unless we told of the adventure and set the sheriff hunting them down, they would feel in little danger.

On the other hand, the Dry Ridge gang may have had nothing to do with it. Some chance thief, or even some hunter, poaching upon the sheriff's property, may have given us that leaden warning. Some one quite out of our reckoning—a cattle thief, even.

Before the east lightened to dawn, I had decided upon one thing only: I meant to have a look down there by daylight. And, in view of my suspicions and the danger there might be if they were correct, I meant to slip away without the knowledge of my pretty maid. I lay down fully dressed upon my bed, and rested there until it was light enough to see plainly.

Going out alone like that in the cool, gray dawn before sunrise, I felt very adventurous, indeed, and as if I had really cut loose from my moorings at the raft of convention—if you like—and had struck out boldly for myself. I knew quite well what I was "going up against," as Ray would have put it. I knew that, if I was right in my surmise and it was one of the Dry Ridge gang we had run close upon, he might object as much to a sunrise call as to a midnight one, and show his objections in the same emphatic manner. So I took my rifle, which I had brought along from the East with a view to hunting deer and other big game.

I'll swear I got downstairs and out of the house without making a sound. I saddled Goldilocks, and rode away from the stable at a walk to insure silence. At the same slow pace, I rode up the long hill to the gate at the top—the gate which divided civilization from wilderness. I leaned from the saddle, as Ellie had done, and opened the gate. I rode through, and turned to close it behind me.

There she came, pounding up the slope at a run, almost, to overtake me. I swung the gate shut between us, and scowled at her across the top.

"You go back to the house," I commanded sternly. "The Bend is no place for a girl—I thought we proved that last night!"

She laughed at me, and wrinkled her nose briefly in an impertinent grimace. "Let me through," she ordered calmly. "The Bend is no place for little boys to ride alone—I thought we proved that last night!"

We glared at each other across the gate, each with a hand upon the topmost bar, each plainly determined to win that duel of wills. But her eyes were dancing with mischief—and I'm afraid my own must have held all the love I bore her in my heart; for a glow that was not of the sunrise came into her cheeks, at last, and her eyelids drooped.

"Let me through," she said again, this time softly pleading.

I felt my fingers tremble on the gate. It was not easy to deny her when she spoke like that, believe me. "It isn't

safe," I argued gently. "I don't want you to get shot. I only want to find out what or who is down there. I won't be long. Go back, like a good girl!" You see, I was doing the pleading, by that time!

"Let me through," she urged. "I've got to go with you. I've a theory, hatched overnight, and I must see if it will bear the test of daylight. Please, kind sir!"

"But—it isn't safe for you, pretty maid!"

"Look," she said proudly, and lifted her right arm, half turning so that I could see the gun swinging at her hip. "I can use that, if I need to. You never saw me shoot, kind sir! Rifle or revolver, I am not ashamed to shoot with father—and he's about the best in the country. I can—why, you wouldn't be in it with me, if we shot at a mark together!" Her eyes met mine anxiously.

"I'm not in it with you at any time or place," I confessed. "But I'm a man—and you're a woman——"

"Oh, how I *hate* that!" She laid hand to the gate suddenly, gave it a jerk, and pulled it toward her in spite of me. I saw that I had made her angry—and there was no stopping her after that. "You, a city man, to come out here and lord it over me, who was *born* in this Bend, just on the strength of your being a man and my being a woman! As if mere sex made up the difference in experience and—and *brains!*" She rode through, slammed the gate shut—making her horse jump when it grazed his rump—and closed the fastening viciously.

I stood back helplessly and watched her; and when she started down the grass-grown trail into the Bend, I fell in meekly behind, and rode, like a groom, six paces in the rear. She rode very straight, her head held like that of a new captain on parade, spurs jingling faintly, gun swinging in an extremely business-like fashion at her hip.

We were down the hill, and skirting the first thin line of timber, when she turned and looked back at me. "What's the matter with Goldilocks?" she inquired, with deceitful solicitude. "Has he gone lame, or something? He has a reputation, you know, of being able to hold his nose even with any horse in the county." She smiled innocently, and waited.

I took the hint, and moved up alongside; and I had sense enough to let it go at that, and neither give nor ask for apology or explanation. She'd had her way, her brief anger was gone, and there was no more to be said about it.

"Don't you want to hear me expound my theory?" she placated, smiling at me sidelong.

"Indeed, I'm very anxious to hear it," I answered eagerly, not caring to intimate, just then, that there was likely to be a rivalry in the matter of theories. I thought my own might well remain unspoken—especially after what she had said of my brain.

"I thought about it all night," she began naïvely. "And, do you know, I half believe the Dry Ridge gang are somehow connected with it. To-morrow, or some day soon, I think we ought to ride over on the Ridge again, and see if there isn't some cañon that leads down to the river opposite the point of the Bend. If they could cross over here, they couldn't ask for a better hiding place. It is inaccessible except through our ranch—unless one crosses the river—and no one would ever think of looking down here. I'm sure it would never occur to father to search the Bend. Wouldn't it be great if we had accidentally stumbled upon their hiding place?"

"In that case," I could not help saying, "I should wish more than ever that you had stayed at home."

"That isn't the point." She frowned. "If here is where they have their hideout, we ought to be able to find it without very much trouble. We'll go down where we were last night when that fellow shot at us, and see if we can find anything. If we can't, we'll search the river bank for some sign of their landing."

If I had not loved her, I think I should have resented the calm way in which she took the leadership and pro-

posed to carry out my own bright ideas. I don't suppose it occurred to her that I had any on the subject, or that they would be worth listening to. But now that she was here and had no intention of abandoning either the trip or the direction of it, I set myself to play the part of obedient slave as amiably as possible. Only once did I gather my courage in both hands, as it were, and speak something which had been lurking in my mind for the past week, making me uneasily conscious of blunder and, perhaps, worse.

"Would you listen," I began, "patiently and without calling me bad names, if I say something very serious?"

She glanced suspiciously at me, and her answer had at least the virtue of frankness. "You aren't going to be slushy, are you?" she inquired anxiously. "You—you aren't going to propose?"

I got back at her, without thinking of chivalry. "Have I given you any reason to believe I ever intended to propose?" I retorted, in as injured a tone as I could simulate. "If I have, let me assure you that it was quite unintentional. I wanted to speak of the Dry Ridge gang."

"Well, you started in just as they all do," she complained, rather red-cheeked. "And one can never tell when a man is going to be silly; it seems to run in the blood, and to break out unexpectedly. Go on, then—if it's about our gang."

"One thing has bothered me considerably, lately," I said earnestly. "While I have oceans of faith in you, at least, and am willing to do anything I can to help, still the fact remains that we are neither of us experienced in the art of running down outlaws. We have managed to stumble upon two or three clues which are rather important, I think; and I feel that, in the proper hands, they might easily betray the whole gang.

"Don't you think that this is getting too big for us? Since last night, I feel sure that we ought to take the sheriff into our confidence. He's used to this sort of thing. He could make every move count, while we—I'm afraid, pretty maid, that, with the best intentions in the world, we are very likely to tip our hand, as gamblers say, and give these outlaws a timely warning when we mean only to catch them.

"If we did that," I hurried on, so as to get it all out before the storm broke, "the sheriff would have a perfect right to blame us for not coming to him in the first place. This fellow taking a shot at us last night means more than all the other clues put together—except, perhaps, the shadow I saw. I think we ought to tell your father about it when he comes home." It was said, and I braced myself to meet her hot anger.

She rode along for several rods without replying, and I could not tell what was her mood. "Do you think we are making any particular blunder right now, riding down here to see what we can find?" she asked, just when I was on the point of begging her pardon and asking her to forget what I had said.

"Well," I told her diffidently, "we may not see anything of them or any sign of them; but it's quite likely they will see us, if they are down here. And they *might* suspect that we are not down here just for the ride and the scenery, especially after what happened last night. And if they have any sense at all, they will take immediate steps to change their boarding place—and I doubt much whether they will leave any address."

She smiled reluctantly, and straightway frowned. "But I don't want to tell father. And I know very well he would just pooh-pooh the whole thing, coming from you and me. He doesn't believe women have any brains of their own—they are fitted with an ingenious arrangement of mirrors, and merely reflect the thoughts of their nearest male relatives. And you are also under the ban, kind sir; for you are straight from the East—and a city chap, into the bargain. So, what could you and I possibly know of the Dry Ridge gang? He and his posses haven't been able

to get any trace of them; so, in his opinion, it would be a certainty that we couldn't know anything about the matter. Perhaps the thing is too big for us—but, we must grow to it!"

I clapped my hands softly in applause. I did admire her immensely for the spirit she showed, and once again I consecrated what brains I had to the solving of the mystery. We did not talk much, after that, but studied the puzzle from all sides, while we rode to the place whence had sung the bullets the night before.

With the sun streaming into that hollow, warming the sand dunes out of their eeriness and touching the great gray rock benignly, we halted and looked curiously about us. We guessed at where the fellow must have been standing when he fired upon us, and went carefully over to the spot. There were signs in the trampled grass of a horse having been tied there, and there was the print of a boot in the soft soil just where the sand begun.

Farther than that we could find nothing, though we quite forgot the danger and searched painstakingly the locality, even trying to track the horse to find out what direction he had taken. We rode on to the extreme point of the Bend, where the river swirled past with a sinister gurgling around the uprooted trees which told of spring freshets—and we scanned the opposite shore for some feasible gulley down which men could ride to a crossing.

"It doesn't seem possible, after all—does it, kind sir?" asked Ellie, at length, turning away from the glinting flood. "I don't believe they did it. And yet—who else would shoot at us in the dark, like that?"

"We'll find who, don't you worry," I cheered. "They must have some crossing; but there are too many miles of river, along here, for us to go over all the ground at one ride. I think we'd better go home and try it again."

We had been out for three hours or so, and we had gained nothing save keen appetites. We turned back into the dim trail, and galloped home—no wiser, it is true, but more determined than ever to keep at it until we succeeded in running down the elusive gang.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY PRETTY MAID?

After I had breakfast and rested a while, it occurred to me that I ought to ride into Porcupine and see how Ray was getting on. To cheer Mother Wellcome, I told her, as casually as possible, of my intention, and asked her if she had any message or any errand that I could do for her.

"Just tell Ray that mother understands," she said quietly, "and that I hope he will do nothing rash or in anger. Tell him to come home—when he can feel right about it. I'm sure," she added, to me, "his father never meant to drive the boy to extremes. He is rather stubborn at times, like Ray—but he means well."

I told her then what I believed had been his motive, and I think it cheered her somewhat.

I found Ray, after a good deal of hunting around town, coming hurriedly down from the courthouse; and I thought I guessed his errand. He blushed like any girl when he saw me, and caught me by the arm.

"Say, you go up and tell the preacher—the Episcopalian—lives up at the end of that street—to be ready to marry me at two o'clock, will you? I've a deuce of a lot of things to see to. Got to reserve a section on the three-thirty train East, and hire a rig, and drive out and get Florence——"

"Aren't you making history pretty fast?" I ventured, trying to adjust myself mentally to his headlong speech and plans.

"Got to." He swung into step beside me as far as the corner, where I was to turn if I went to see the minister for him. "I've had one deuce of a time, Walter. Florence's folks seem to object to me as much as dad does to her. I don't see what's the matter with everybody, all at once. So, I'm going

to marry her and pull out to-day, before they make up their minds about what they're going to do. Steve's the only white one in the bunch; he told me to go ahead, and that he wished me luck—better luck than he'd had, he said. He's wanted sis for the last three or four years, but I think dad headed him off so he never asked her right out to marry him.

"You turn up this street, Walter, and tell him two o'clock, sure, and not to say anything about it. I don't think dad expects to be back before the night train, but it's best to be safe; and her father and Fred are gone somewhere to-day—I phoned out, and she told me they wouldn't be home till to-morrow, maybe. Now, you be sure you tell him two o'clock; and if he can't make good, get some other preacher. There are five or six in town, I think." He whirled about, and rushed off.

I walked slowly until I had untangled what he had jumbled together, and wondered if matrimony always produced such incoherence. But I was with Ray, heart and soul, and not at all averse to being pulled into his service by the hair, so to speak. I sought the Episcopalian, failed to find him, hunted up another, found him booked for a funeral at two, and went on to the next. I did finally engage one; his English was a bit shaky, I remember, and his hair nearly white—though not with age. But he was the best I could do; and I knew Ray would not mind, so long as the marriage took place promptly at two. Indeed, I doubted much if he would know the difference.

Ray had not told me where to meet him and report; so I had to wait around on the street until I saw him drive into town with Florence, and then hail him and tell him of the arrangements I had made. I did another thing which had not occurred to Ray. I telephoned to his mother, and told her that Ray was going to be married, and would she like to be present.

She would, but I think she did not quite dare to face the displeasure of the sheriff by seeming to aid and abet Ray in his frank rebellion. So she sent Ellie, instead; and we stood up with the bridal couple, and tried to give an air of festivity to the occasion, though I think we all felt rather scared—both at matrimony and the sheriff. The bride had a big bunch of roses—I had telephoned frantically all over town to get them—and the tow-headed preacher perked up and claimed a kiss, an old-fashioned ceremony which he seemed very proud to perform.

We saw them safely started on the three-thirty train, watched the train itself dwindle to a trail of smoke, and went home, a bit sobered. Ellie had driven Pansy Girl; so I, having a saddle horse on my hands, and not caring to lead him—not being invited, either, to ride with Ellie—galloped on ahead. I had given Mother Wellcome all the details of Ray's wedding, and had left her crying softly and furtively, and had settled myself in the hammock, wondering why parents never seem able to look with equanimity upon the marriage of their children, when Ellie came and plumped down beside me in the sheriff's big cane rocker.

"There's going to be an awful row when father gets back," she announced calmly.

I had thought so, myself; so I nodded. There was no good in dwelling upon so unpleasant a certainty.

"Seeing there will be fireworks, anyway," she went on, "a little more won't matter. So I'm going to take the dogs down into the Bend, to-night, and put them on——"

"You're not going to do anything of the kind," I interrupted. "You're going to stay at home, to-night, where you belong."

"Am I?" Her soft tone threatened much.

"You are," I declared rashly. "Next time, they wouldn't trouble to aim over our heads."

"Oh! Are you afraid?"

"Yes," I said boldly, "I am. I tell you flatly that I shall not go with you—and I doubt much whether you will care to go alone." I felt sure that would settle it, though she would prob-

ably be furious and say disagreeable things about my courage.

She sat, for a minute or two, with her hands clasped behind her head, studying my face and smiling in a superior fashion which made me squirm inwardly. "All the same, I am going down there this evening, and I am going to take the dogs," she said calmly, and got up and left me before I could answer.

Just to show my perfect independence and indifference, I stayed in the hammock, instead of following her for further argument, as I wanted to do. Really, she was altogether too engrossed in the chase to please me; for, with Ray's sudden plunge into matrimony fresh in my mind, I had half made up my mind to go and do likewise. I was rather looking forward to asking Ellie, that very evening, if she would marry me, and cut out this chumming business—or, at least, put it on a more permanent basis. But, if she were going to go chasing down into the Bend again——

I lay back, stared at the clouds and the blue sky between, and swung myself gently, with the toe of my shoe striking against the porch railing. Should I stay on at Big Bend ranch, now that Ray was gone? I could not blame him for forgetting all about my rights as a guest, and my embarrassing position once he was gone; but I realized that it was going to be deuced uncomfortable, all the same. If I went immediately, I should have to give up my daily companionship with the girl who, I was beginning to feel, belonged by right to me; and she would resent my desertion before we had caught that enterprising bunch of outlaws, over whom we were taking so much thought and trouble. If I stayed, I felt that it would be on sufferance, so far as the sheriff was concerned; for I had worked against him, and he would know it—and, besides, what excuse could I have for staying?

The only way out—the only way that appealed to me—was to do as Ray had done. I must marry my pretty maid, and go a-journeying. But that, too, had its drawbacks; because I was not at all sure she would let me marry her. In fact, I was quite sure she wouldn't.

Just then she passed me, coming out of the house and going down the steps toward the dog kennels. As she went by, she looked mischievously in my direction, and held up a small object which she put in her pocket immediately after.

I glanced at it, and groaned aloud, and she laughed all the way to the kennels. I could hear her. For the object she showed me was the little tin box, still sealed with blue letter wax—the box which held the piece of saddle string.

She meant it, then. Or, at any rate, she meant to make me believe she did. But I brought to the front all the mulish obstinacy there was in my nature, and decided that two could play at that game. Whatever she did, I did not mean to go into the Bend that night, or any other night. And when I recalled how closely she had kept her horse alongside mine, the night before, when we had not dreamed of any real danger, I felt satisfied that she would not dare to go without me. She counted on my giving in at the last moment; and that I was determined not to do, unless, indeed, I could persuade her to let me go alone—and I had little hope of that.

All through dinner she was in high spirits, apparently, and laughed and gossiped about Ray and Florence, and how scared they had looked, and how Ray kept glancing behind him while they waited for the train—exactly, she said, as if he had his pockets full of stolen apples. She got her mother to taking a brighter view of the affair, and even to plan the building of a cottage for them in town, when their wedding journey was over and the sheriff had settled his mind to make the best of it; but I knew that she was aiming her good temper at me, in the hope of wheedling me into taking that trip with the dogs, and so I set my face sternly and refused to enter into her mood.

"Well, sulk if you want to. Good-by, and wish me good luck," she half whispered in my ear, when I stood in the doorway afterward, as she brushed past me. She had on her riding clothes, and in her hand she carried ostentatiously the little tin box.

"Where are you going *now*, Ellie?" her mother called after her, in a resigned tone of passive disapproval.

"Oh, just for a ride. The dogs need exercising," the girl called back over her shoulder.

"I thought I heard your father tell you not to take the dogs out."

"He was in a bad humor, then; besides, he isn't here."

"I should think you'd had riding enough in one day—but you can't be easy unless you're on a horse. You ought to have been the boy, Ellie, and Ray the girl." Mother Wellcome was not often peevish, but she had had a good deal to worry her during the past few days; and I could not wonder that her nerves were showing the strain.

"You'll have my company," I said to her, much louder than was necessary, since she stood within three feet of me. "I don't feel like riding, this evening." I turned to go in.

Reflected in the window beside me, I saw Ellie stop and look at me a moment. But she did not turn from her purpose; she untied the dogs, snapped the long leashes into their collars, and started defiantly for the stable. Even while I stood watching uneasily from behind the white curtains of the living room, she rode away up the hill toward the gate over which we had clashed that morning; and I could not tell, from her general attitude, that she was in the least disturbed or undecided.

I waited through half an hour of mental torment. I argued the thing coldly, at first, until the dragging minutes when she did not return got on my nerves. I told myself a hundred times that she would never dare to go down there alone; a thousand times I faced the certainty that she would dare anything, once she made up her mind to it. I watched the skyline anxiously, every minute hoping that she would appear, every second fearing that she would not come back but would keep straight on, too proud to shrink from a venture because she was a woman. A keen remembrance of how sensitive she was over that matter of sex drove me in haste to the stable. For a wonder, Chub was there; but I would not wait for his deliberate saddling of my horse.

In an amazingly short time from my leaving the house, I was galloping up the trail on Goldilocks, in a mind to test the vaunted speed and endurance of the horse. I hurried through the gate, sent him down the hill beyond, at a pace which I knew afterward was a mighty good way to stiffen him up and spoil him, and searched the trail ahead for sight of her.

I pulled up at the foot and listened, but I could not hear the dogs; and so I knew that they had not yet been put upon the scent—always supposing there *was* a scent. I hoped she had not yet reached that gloomy hollow by the big gray rock; but I knew she would ride fast, and one can cover quite a distance in half an hour of hurried riding. With that, I loosened the reins, and Goldilocks swung out into a long gallop that was soothing to my nerves.

I rounded a clump of bushes, and my horse jumped clear of the trail and snorted—for I had nearly run over Texas, nosing at the very end of his leash. Ellie was dismounted and sitting beside the bushes, holding her horse and the dogs, humming a little tune under her breath.

"You sure took your time," she remarked impertinently and slangily, and got up to remount. "It will be dark before we know it, and I think we can do better if we have a little daylight to start in with. I'm perfectly wild with curiosity to see if my saddle string is going to work down here. Wouldn't it be great, kind sir, if it was the saddle-string scent?"

What could I do? She had beaten me fairly, and was going to have her own way, in spite of me; so there was no good in being nasty about it. I

swallowed what anger I could possibly feel toward her, and set myself, with what grace I could, to the task of protecting her from harm. But I felt as if I needed at least fifty pairs of good eyes to see everything before and behind and on all sides, in that cursed country. With just two pairs of eyes, we were too much at the mercy of fate to suit me; though I will own frankly that I was not worrying much on my own account. I was, however, horribly afraid for the girl.

Nothing could stop her. I tried to make her see the danger and the foolishness, but she would not listen.

"In all my life, this is the first time I've really given my whole heart to a thing," she said. "It's the first time I've ever felt that I was using all the brains I had, and all the courage. Why must I stop, just when we're close to discovering what we want to know? If I were Ray," she added bitterly, "you wouldn't argue against it; you aren't afraid, however much you may say you are. You'd come down here alone, and think nothing of it. It's just because I'm a girl, and girls are supposed to be cuddled at home and never allowed to risk their complexions, even—to say nothing of their lives! You're like all the rest—so near to the savage that you don't want a woman to——"

"I don't remember that savages were particularly careful of their women," I interrupted mildly. "I've a hazy idea that they——"

"Oh, you're just trying to sidetrack the question!" she cried. "What I want you to do, is to forget that I'm a woman, for a while, and let me be free from that millstone of sex. I hate it. It's perfectly silly, because you feel quite equal to this, yourself, and you think I'm out of place down here on this errand; and in spite of that, I'm just as well fitted for the risk as you are. Better; for I know the Bend, and I can shoot as straight, at least, and ride better, and I'm nearly as strong, if it came to a fight, and—— I haven't been through college, perhaps, and I don't know Greek; but for all present emergencies I think I'm quite as wise as you are!"

"Except," I put in, "that I'm wise enough to see where this thing is likely to get too big for us to handle alone, and you aren't. Don't overlook that, please."

"I *will* handle it alone—without you, even, if you say much more!" she gritted angrily, and rode with head averted.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRAIL OF THE SADDLE STRING.

The crimson was fading from the sky, and all about us were gray dusk and mysterious, creeping shadows, when we came to the big rock.

We stood, for a minute or two, peering about us; for we both felt that this rock was, somehow, intimately connected with the Dry Ridge gang—a meeting place, or something like that—and for all we knew, their hide-out might be within calling distance.

"I'm going to take the dogs over where that horse was tied, last night," she said at last, speaking in an undertone. "I've heard father say that they can follow a scent twenty-four hours old, if it's distinct at the beginning. This one isn't that old, you know. Oh," she added, pulling up when she had gone a few steps, "I suppose I ought to give them the saddle string, so we can make sure if this is the same. How stupid! I came near forgetting the connecting link in our chain!" She would not let me do a thing, but dismounted, broke off the blue wax with a stone, and opened the box. Inside was the piece of leather string, neatly coiled and packed in closely.

She held it to her nose, sniffing tentatively. "It smells like leather, all right," she announced, smiling up at me. "Here, Texas! And Bannock—here! Go seek 'em." She held the tin box gravely down for their inspection.

I smiled to see the quivering of their nostrils, the perk of their heads at the saddle string; and then I thought how

much it might mean to the poor devils whom we were hunting, and I shivered involuntarily. Did that piece of string, and the odor it held, really mean anything in the game we were playing?

"Go find 'em, boys!" Ellie was coaxing the dogs. She knelt and unfastened the leashes. "I'm going to turn them loose," she said to me. "They can't get far away from us, and it would be a nuisance to hold them, in this brush. See? I believe they've got the idea, all right; they're smelling around as if——"

She mounted hastily, and we watched the dogs circling there in the dusk, their noses to the ground. I think we both forgot to breathe when they neared the tree where the trampled ground told of a horse being tied there, the night before; I know I discovered that I had been holding my breath, when Texas reached the place and gave a yelp, with Bannock close at his heels.

They started off; and we, looking at each other half fearfully, followed close behind.

"It is—it *is* the trail of the saddle string! They found the scent—it's the same—oh, think what it means! Oh, if they can hold it—if it doesn't take to the river! You know, I found it by that spring, and the dogs followed the scent of it; and we ran into the pepper trail, which proves we were on the trail of the gang. And down here somebody shot to warn us off—and the saddle-string scent led the dogs to where his horse was tied, and——" She was going over it all, step by step, marshaling the facts in her own mind while she spoke them aloud to me. "Oh, if anything were to put them off the scent now, it—I know it would break my heart!"

"Don't!" I cried out suddenly, warned by some instinct which I cannot name. "Don't talk about breaking hearts, pretty maid. It gives me a chilly feeling."

"Oh, well, I don't mean *really,* kind sir." She laughed a bit, and gave her attention to the dogs.

They had been nosing along and doing a good deal of doubling back on the trail, as if the horseman had ridden aimlessly or had been hunting something. But after five or ten minutes of that, they circled a belt of timber, and started off toward the river, as nearly as we could tell.

"He's going to cross, and we'll lose him," wailed Ellie, in a fever of anxiety. "And they're going beautifully! He never thought to cover his trail, down here; and if he crosses the river, we've got to mark the place as nearly as we can, and take up the trail from the other side at daylight!"

"You ought to be sheriff yourself, instead of your father," I bantered, secretly much impressed by her indefatigable zeal. "I believe you would 'take them into camp,' as your father would say."

She was riding a pace in front, because the way was narrow there and she could not bear to follow anything but the dogs. She looked back at me, quickly impatient. "Have you just awakened to that fact?" she asked, half offended. "Of course I would! What do you suppose I've been lying awake nights for, and thinking till I'm nearly crazy, if I didn't mean to take them into camp? Everybody else is after them; and everybody else is making a mess of it, and letting the Dry Ridge gang give them the laugh. They won't laugh at *me.* I promise you!"

Before we realized that it was so close, we had reached the river. Ellie had tears in her voice when she saw it glimmering in the dim light. "He crossed," she cried, "and we'll have to wait till morning—with the scent growing colder every minute!"

The dogs went to the very bank, hesitated, and started off along the grassy ridge; and we followed hopefully after. At any rate, he had not crossed immediately.

It was growing dark so fast that it seemed like drawing a black curtain slowly up from all sides at once. The far shore of the river, indistinct when we first came out to the water, backed slowly into the shadows and disappeared. We could see the gray glim-

mer of water, off there to our left, and nearer, the dim shore line, with trees swaying lonesomely in the breeze which had come with the dark. Somewhere an owl hooted lugubriously—one of those owls which inquire "Who-o? Who-o?" with melancholy insistence. A coyote yapped querulous reply behind us, and the two dogs yelped occasionally along the trail in front. I don't think it was fear that brought my old dread of the place surging to the foreground of my mind. I had always hated the Bend; and the hate grew with familiarity.

I began insensibly to listen and to strain my eyes at all the dark places, and I tried to keep beside Ellie, who was leaning forward in the saddle and thinking only of the dogs and the trail, and of helping her horse over the bad places without slackening her pace. I don't believe she remembered that I was there, after we turned up along the river. She seemed to be possessed wholly by the chase; for I spoke to her several times and got no answer.

I was just beginning to wonder a bit at the course we seemed to be taking, and to suspect that the dogs were off on a wrong scent, when it seemed to me that I heard some one coming along behind us. I listened, heard the sound again, spoke to Ellie, got no reply, and pulled up to investigate.

If some one were trailing us, I wanted to know it, and I felt that I could not know it a second too soon. I told Ellie to go on, and that I would overtake her in a minute. Then I drew off a little to one side, where the shadows would wrap me kindly, and waited—waited with my revolver cuddled in my fist, and my eyes searching the gloom out of which we had just ridden.

I heard one of the dogs yelp, straight ahead. I heard them swerve to the right and then go on, and I knew that the girl was close at their heels and out of the way of whatever danger might be behind; so I was fairly easy in my mind. Plainly enough, I heard a horse galloping; and it was not long before I fancied that there were two or three, at the least.

I shall not try to tell all the wild conjectures that raced through my brain while I sat there, stroking Goldilocks' neck, now and then, to hold him quiet.

The pound of hoofs came closer, hesitated, and trampled uncertainly; a horse snorted close by. I moved Goldilocks cautiously, so that I could see beyond the clump of brush where I had stopped; and when I had gone a few steps, I saw what was the pursuit—three or four horses running loose, part of the bunch we had glimpsed now and then in riding through the Bend. I could see them quite plainly against the shimmer of the river beyond, and I swore at them for delaying me so.

Once I knew that was the extent of it, and that no other hoofbeats were within sound, I started off after Ellie—and then I found that I had lost her, like the idiot I was. With the wind freshened and blowing toward where they had disappeared, I could not hear the dogs; I could only guess at the general direction, and take the chance of riding up within hearing distance before they got too far away.

I pounded along in the dark until I was stopped by a black streak which Goldilocks very sensibly refused to cross. I dismounted to explore more closely, found that it was a deep, narrow gully—the depth I proved by kicking a stone into it—and turned to the right. I had heard the dogs veer to the right, I remembered, and this must be the point where they turned; and it comforted me somewhat to remember that we were supposedly following the trail of a horseman, and that he would certainly not ride where we could not follow—for I doubted much if even the Dry Ridge gang were better mounted than Ellie and I.

I skirted the gully, all right, and turned back down the other side; for it had seemed to me that I had heard the dogs come back to an approximately straight line from where I had dropped behind. Beyond that, I was all at sea, and could only guess and ride. The Bend was not very wide, that was one comfort; and since they were not

behind me, they must be in front. Simple reasoning, that, and not without its grain of comfort.

By then it was as dark as it would get; and that was dark enough, believe me. I knew that I was riding out of the Bend, but that was the extent of my knowledge. I hatched a brand-new theory, however; and the farther I rode, the more plausible it seemed. I believed that my man of the shadow, the town accomplice, had ridden into the Bend—probably to signal his confederates across the river; I could see no better way of getting word to them than that—and we had accidentally ran upon him there, and startled him into shooting. His trail—if it were really his trail which the dogs were following—seemed in a fair way to lead us toward town, if not actually into its streets. I began wildly to hope that the dogs were right, and that we might run down the man who had, so far, eluded me.

The dogs might, I conjectured, trail him into town and into some place where I could locate him positively. If that were possible, there was all the more reason for me to overtake them and be with Ellie at the finish.

Wanting a thing and getting it are two different propositions, as I found, to my harrowing anxiety, during the next hour or so. I went on and on, listening for the dogs and not hearing them; though whether the distance or the wind was responsible for that I could not tell. I came upon a wire fence which I knew must be Wellcome's, rode down toward the river, and reached a blank where a gate had been left open. I found that out because Goldilocks went through, and I saw a post close beside me. I dismounted there, and struck a match to see if I could distinguish any footprints which would show that Ellie had come that way.

It isn't easy to make a match burn, outside, when the wind is blowing; and I nearly emptied my match safe before I accomplished the feat. Even then, I could not tell anything for certain, though it seemed to me that there were hoofmarks beside those which Goldilocks had just made. The gate was a simple contrivance, made by fastening the wire to stakes—the country was full of them. And, as I stood there, for a second, I heard the river gurgle not far away.

I left the gate lying on the ground, as I had found it, and mounted. I had two positive facts to weave into my theory as I might. The trail must have taken the dogs out of the Bend; for there was no fence except Wellcome's, which crossed the mouth of it and closed the pocket made by the river looping around. Also, the fellow had chosen that gate next the river and farthest from Wellcome's house—which must be nearly a mile off, with hills and hollows between. That, it seemed to me, proved conclusively that he had tried to avoid being seen going into the Bend; for the trail from town to the ranch was much more direct, I was sure.

Goldilocks seemed to have a suspicion that he was going toward home—the man who had owned him lived in Porcupine—for he settled into that long lope which covers more miles in a given space of time than any other gait. I let him go. There was no use in wandering around trying to find Ellie in there; and if she had really gone to town, I could overtake her, riding like that.

We came, by good luck, to another gate, which was also lying on the ground, pulled off to one side for easy passing. I used my brain a little, and decided that Ellie must have gone that way and left the gate down for me, because I knew that this gate led the way to other land than Wellcome's, and certainly would be closed to keep in his stock. Acting upon that theory, I took the time to close it behind me. The other one hadn't mattered so much, since it opened into the Bend.

After that, I let Goldilocks take his own pace and choose his own trail; for he knew quite as much about direction as I did. He went straight enough, and I knew that we should eventually swing into the trail to town; and that,

it seemed to me, was the way in which I ought to travel.

I had just become aware that Goldilocks was in the trail and was pulling toward town, when I heard a dog somewhere behind me. The wind was right, then, for bringing me the sound; and I pulled in to listen. If that was Bannock or Texas, then they had swung off, and were not going to town, after all. But that, at the time, did not concern me much, though it might mean that I should be compelled to revise my latest theory. Where those dogs were, I knew I should find Ellie —that was the first consideration.

It came again—the unmistakable yelp of a dog, brought faintly to me with the wind. I wheeled and galloped in that direction; and, since the trail I was on seemed to lead right, I kept it for sake of the easier going. When I heard the sound for the third time, followed by a hysterical little chorus of yelping, I touched Goldilocks suggestively with my heels. Right then I received the sensation of really flying through space. They had told me he had speed; but I hadn't tried him out, and didn't realize just how much that might mean.

The trail was good and fairly level, along there. He pointed his nose to the wind and ran in long, undulating leaps that took my breath, at first, until I leaned low and so did not swallow quite so much of the wind that whistled past. He raised that steady breeze to a gale that sent my hat flying somewhere in the dark; and I almost forgot, for a minute or two, what I was after.

But the yelping of the dogs grew clearer and more insistent, as if the scent had grown suddenly hotter and they were nearing the end of the trail. I hurtled down a long hill as if I were on a toboggan, rounded a clump of timber, and heard the baying that told eloquently of the chase ended.

Where that end was did not matter to me at first. I was close to Ellie, I hoped. Until that hope became a certainty and I knew that she was quite safe, I had no thoughts for anything else, until, having pulled Goldilocks down to a walk, that I might not startle her—and also to hide from her my anxiety about her—I passed a house.

The house was lighted—at least, one room on the ground floor was lighted—and, for a minute, outlined cleanly upon a curtain of some light stuff, I saw the silhouette—that same silhouette which had come near to haunting me, the shadow which I had seen in the bank at the time it was being robbed.

I was stunned into inaction; and for the time being my brain was a blank, except for the shadow which filled it in amazed recognition. I did not signal to Goldilocks to stop; and so, perfectly trained as he was, he went on past the house, without a pause, and brought up in the middle of the clamor at the stables. The dogs were there, baying throatily, and with much industry; and Texas was pawing exultantly a saddle that lay upon its side on the ground beside the stable corner.

I slid off, still dazed to incoherent thought. I did not see Ellie, though I could distinguish the outline of a horse which I felt sure was hers. I walked mechanically over to the saddle, slapped venturously at Texas, and felt his snapping teeth graze my hand as he backed growling away. Then I lighted the lone match which was left in my safe, and examined the saddle by its flare.

What I was looking for was easy enough to find. My eyes and my free hand went instantly to the strings behind the cantle. My fingers closed upon one that was broken so that it was only about half the length of its mate; and, as I held them up together, I saw that the broken end must have been of the length of the piece which Ellie had found by the spring in the Dry Ridge country.

The match flickered out, and I stood there in the dark, looking dumbly down at the black bulk of the saddle. So, the trail of the saddle string was ended —here! Here, of all places in the world. I felt suddenly sick and weak, and I went and leaned for just a minute upon Goldilocks, while I tried to think.

CHAPTER XVI.

BITTER FRUIT OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE.

Like a man hypnotized, I turned and went back to the house. He was there—my man of the shadow. I had seen him there. And Ellie—I must find her and be with her, if she needed me. Beyond those simple ideas I could not go; I could not face the light of truth—not yet.

The door was open—the door toward the stable. She was in there, standing backed against a table, gripping its edges with her gloved fingers; her face, turned toward me, was white and terrible, and her eyes—— I stopped just outside the door; for I could not force myself inside, with that face toward me. If she would turn her head, I thought, then I would go in. Steve—it was Steve—stood with his back to the door and to me. How *he* looked I do not know; but his voice had the very devil in it—the devil of reckless despair, and of a courage that will taunt death to its very face. He was speaking, and I listened.

"Yes—you're shocked! You couldn't dream that a man could do such things, could you? You've found me out, and you're going to do your duty and turn me over to the law—not because you feel so horribly shocked, lady mine—not that; but because you're mad clear through at being fooled all this while. Because I didn't go and tell you, and ask you to forgive me, and I'd be a good boy! Well, go ahead—if you want to. I'm one of the Dry Ridge gang, all right, and that piece of string came off my saddle. Also, I'm the fellow who took a shot at you and that new friend of yours, last night, in the Bend. I didn't know who it was till afterward, though, or I wouldn't have bothered you."

"Oh, I hate you, Steve Johnson!" Her voice was low, but it stung like a whip with bitterness. "I'm glad I did find you out. I won't waste any more thought on you, or any—— Oh, how *could* you be a—a thief? I could bear murder, I think, better than this—to break into safes and steal money! I shall tell father, the very minute he comes home."

Steve laughed back at her. "Yes, tell your father, lady mine! He'll maybe be glad to be told. Listen here, though, and think it over first. Your dad happens to be the Big Chief himself. He's always planned and paved the way, and set us to work—set *me* to work," he corrected himself quickly—"and got the biggest share of the plunder. I expect that hat of yours, and that riding outfit, were paid for with stolen money. Don't you think, on the whole, you're in kinda deep, yourself?"

He reached into his pocket, got out his tobacco and papers, and rolled himself a cigarette with fingers that seemed to be quite steady. "I can't for the life of me see where you're going to win anything by going to your father," he added, while he lifted a foot and scratched a match on the sole of his shoe. "I know the sheriff better than you do, if you are his daughter. I ain't scary, as a general thing, but if I were in your place I'd hesitate a lot before I bawled him out about being leader of the Dry Ridge gang. He—he might turn nasty, and do——"

Ellie was scarcely listening. She pulled off her gloves, looked at them as if they were snakes, and threw them across the room. "He got them last week," she cried hysterically. Then she pulled herself together, and faced Steve once more—Steve and his horrible words—with her mouth drawn to a thin line—the fighting line.

"I don't believe a word you say," she told him coldly. "I caught you fairly, so that you had to admit it—but it isn't worthy, even of you, to try and shield yourself behind my own father. *My* father," she said proudly, "is not a thief. He is not even a political grafter. I know positively how he has been fighting graft in county politics. Do you think a man like that would steal—would head such a—a bunch as the Dry Ridge gang? It's a very good bluff, Steve—but it isn't quite good

enough. I ask you to show your proof."

I heard the sharp breath which Steve drew before he spoke. "Ellie," he said, with a little catch in his voice, "what did you do it for? The gang wasn't hurting *you*, that you should hunt it down. You've just piled up a lot of misery for yourself—and everybody. Why, girl," he went on, stretching a hand toward her impulsively, "ain't it proof enough, that I've stood back all this while when I loved you—*loved* you, lady mine! Your father didn't want me to marry his daughter—black as he is, he seemed to think it was enough to be the daughter of a highway robber, without being the wife of one! And I couldn't ask you, either, to marry me and take a chance. I'd turn out; and until we made a stake big enough to quit on, there was always a chance that something might go wrong. This last haul was going to be the last; your father agreed that we'd quit at that, though he's got it in his blood—and I believe the old devil *likes* to walk off with a bag of dough that somebody else has raked together.

"We've quit, Ellie. That ninety thousand put us all to the good, and —— Your father said that in a year, if the thing died down so there was no danger, I could take a chance. I could have made you care, Ellie, if you hadn't meddled with this business. I know——"

She was shaken, I could see; but she was game, and would not let him see if she did care. "I asked for *proof*," she interrupted, the more pitilessly because she was fighting herself, too.

Steve winced and hardened to his first taunting manner. "Oh, that's easy to furnish," he said lightly. "The chief is due here to-night, if he gets in on that evening train, as he expected. He ought to be here any time, now. He's coming over after some money—a little of that ninety thousand! You can ask him yourself, if you've got the nerve. He'll likely tell yuh—and he may object to you taking the dogs out again. It's too bad," he added laconically, "the gang's about to cash in and quit the game. We might have given you a job with us, you're so bright!"

The blood surged up into her white face, and her eyes left him. I think she was remembering some of those revolutionary theories which she had been so fond of expressing to me—theories which did not hold, after all, in the test of reality. According to her vaunted doctrines of life, she ought to be proud of Steve and of her father, and to admire their prowess and their skill. She had been so very frank in her admiration of the Dry Ridge gang—when the Dry Ridge gang was but an abstract force, fighting with long odds against them. But now that it had come home to her, the picturesque element seemed to have lost its charm.

Why, I asked myself, while I stood there in the dark outside—why wasn't she pleased with the knowledge that she herself was the daughter of the gang's leader? For she believed the charge, however much she might deny and defend. There had been a ring of truth in Steve's calm voice when he told her; and she had heard it, and had been convinced. She had told me that she could love a man like Steve—a man who was a member of the Dry Ridge gang, with all the reckless courage which that meant. But I felt that she was repelled, now, instead of being attracted.

Because her eyes were wandering anywhere, so that they might not meet Steve's, she caught sight of me, standing helplessly in the shadows. I do not consider, mind, that I was an eavesdropper, in any sense; I had come upon a situation too big for my meddling, and I had stood aside while they two fought the bitterest battle of their lives—and they fought bravely, I must own, with no yellow streak showing in either, and no quarter asked or given. But she saw me, in the silence that came between them. She let go the table, and started forward, her hands out appealingly.

"Oh, kind sir!" she cried, with a sobbing note more pitiful than tears.

"The Dry Ridge gang—it is father—and Steve! Oh, Walter, *what shall I do?*"

I know what *I* did—and I had not the least hesitation in doing it. I brushed past Steve, half turned and on the defensive, and took her in my arms, quite as if I'd always had the right to protect her. "Never mind," I soothed foolishly, but effectively, I think. "It will come out, somehow, if we don't get weak in the knees. You're a brave little maid. Brace up and meet it like—a man!" My eyes, glancing over her head, met Steve's, and in that long, searching look I think we understood each other very well indeed.

"You win," he said stoically, and even smiled. A bitter smile it was; and, more than anything he could have done, it shattered my antagonism. "I hope you're good enough—I wasn't."

"Old man," I began impulsively, and stuck there. After all, what was there that I could say to him? But he understood; I'm sure he did.

"That's all right," he said quietly. "Don't mind me—you look out for your own pot uh gold." He rolled another cigarette imperturbably. "I've made a mess of things, myself, all the way along the line; but I ain't one to whimper now it's too late."

I shall never feel ashamed of the moisture which came into my eyes, or of the lump which rose in my throat. I patted Ellie on the shoulder; for she was crying and sobbing quite like a woman, and not at all like a man. After all, sex limitation held her fast in its grip, however much she might rebel, at times, against the bond. When the sun shone, she would be a man; but in time of storm she was only a woman, after all—a dear, womanly woman, with a heart too tender for harsh work such as this would be.

I think it was her weakness which braced me to sternness and the determination to handle this as a man should, when all my instincts were for backing off and bidding them go in peace; for I am not by nature warlike. I should make a mighty poor judge, and a worse prosecuting attorney. If I ever did settle down seriously to law, I'm sure I should confine my energies to defending the poor devils who are likely to get the worst of the deal.

Even now, in the very face of what Steve frankly owned himself to be—a highway robber of the boldest—if I had followed my impulse, I should have gone over and slapped him on the shoulder, and said: "Buck up, old man, and don't look so deuced glum. We'll pull you out of the hole, somehow." That, I think, was because I liked Steve; he was one of those lovable chaps whom you can't help liking at first sight. I take much credit to myself that I stood there and gave no sign of how I felt toward him.

He smoked his cigarette, leaning against the door casing, quite at ease, but with shadows in his eyes, and hard lines around his mouth, and two deep creases between his eyebrows—brooding over his failure, I think, and the losing of his last chance to win my pretty maid. None of us spoke for five minutes; and, save for the girl's suppressed sobbing, there was no sound in the room.

There were hoofbeats outside, and presently the sheriff opened the other door. Big, placid-faced, and half smiling, he entered; his eyes seemed to bore through every object in the room, especially Ellie and me. She had lifted her head at the sound of his coming; now she gave him a single glance, and clung to me the tighter, her face pressed against my shoulder.

"Well! Well!" The sheriff paused, as if hesitating over the exact way in which he should take hold of the amazing situation. "What's the matter, here? Ellie hurt herself—or anything?"

"Yes," I said simply, looking him straight in the eye—not as easy to do, by the way, as it sounds. "She has. She and I have run down the Dry Ridge gang. That," I added meaningly, "hurts a good deal."

The sheriff did not utter a sound. His hand jerked back, with the instinct of defending himself, at all costs, against discovery.

Steve flicked the ash from his cigarette. "I wouldn't do anything like that," he drawled. "Yuh got to remember who they are."

The sheriff darted toward him a venomous glance. "How much uh this is your doing?" he asked.

Steve waved his hand toward me. "Ask your guest," he said. "You can take anything he says as straight goods, I reckon."

"It wasn't Steve's fault," I told the sheriff. "It was just a chain of circumstances. We had a piece of a saddle string, which we found out on Dry Ridge, that morning we were out with the dogs. We put them on the scent, and ran into pepper. So we saved the string—sealed it up in an airtight box—and when somebody took a shot at us down there in the Bend, last night, we drew our own conclusions, and took the dogs and the saddle string down there, this evening. They picked up the trail at once, and brought us—here, and tried to eat Steve's saddle in their enthusiasm." The atmosphere was getting so tense, that I flew to flippancy for relief.

"That isn't quite all," I went on. "The night of the robbery, I happened to be outside the bank. I saw, on the ground-glass partition inside, the silhouette of a man's face—a shadow cast by the desk lamp there. Tonight, as I rode by that window"—I motioned with my head—"I glanced in and saw the same profile—the profile of Steve. I think," I finished steadily, "the case is fairly clear. As far as *you* are concerned, Steve told Ellie privately—as he thought—of your connection with the gang. But it was when she had threatened to make the whole thing public, and he did it to save you as well as himself."

The sheriff stood quiet, listening, and weighing carefully my words as I spoke them; I breathed easier when two minutes had passed, for it was the first explosion which I had feared. I knew that, if he took time to think, there would be no danger. He would scarcely care to kill Ellie and me deliberately, even if he could.

"We-l-l," he drawled, at last, "you've managed to blunder onto quite a lot of wisdom—not all of it real healthy to have. What yuh going to do about it? Going to swear out a warrant in the morning?"

One part of my brain had been studying the what-to-do-about-it, while I stood there. I will not attempt to defend my course; perhaps it was reprehensible, and compounding a felony, and all that. But take any man and place him in my position—with no responsibility save as a citizen, and with all the pity and all the sympathy of a friend and a lover—and see what he will do!

"I don't know that I should care to have my father-in-law serving a term in the penitentiary," I replied. "I'm a selfish brute, and while I'd like to see you both get what you deserve, on general principles, it would be deuced awkward, under the circumstances. I'm going to marry Ellie, you see, and so——"

She started, and pulled away from me unexpectedly. "No! No, you're not. You can't—you *mustn't!* Think what the disgrace would be! My own father——" She was near hysteria, I think, and one cannot wonder at it.

I gathered her into my arms again, and went on, reserving all argument with her until such time as we were alone together. "I'm going to marry your daughter, Mr. Wellcome; and so I won't pile up any more misery and disgrace for her, and Ray, and——"

He wilted at mention of Ray. "My God, Walter—don't tell Ray!" He started toward me, all the fight gone. "Don't let the boy despise me! It was to save him from marrying the daughter——"

"Look out, there!" Steve straightened, and became the fighting man. "I'm in it, and you're in it—up to our necks, both of us. But take damn good care yuh don't pull any one else in!" He had a gun in his hand long before he finished speaking.

The sheriff eyed him. "Oh—all right," he conceded. "I didn't know how much these——" He turned to

me again, leaving the sentence unfinished. The interruption had steadied him so that he showed no further weak spot concerning Ray or any one else. "If you'll promise to keep this thing quiet—just between *us*—why, I'll do anything else yuh say. Only so it don't get out. Not for *my* sake—if it was me alone, I'd say: 'Send me over the road, if yuh can, and be damned to yuh.' But there's others to think of. There's Ellie, and her mother——"

"I'm thinking of them," I retorted, "to better purpose than you appear to have done, these past few years. What I was about to say was that you'll have to disgorge that gold—and any other plunder you may happen to have. It has occurred to me that the Bend would be a good place to hide that ninety thousand—I wonder if it isn't somewhere around that big rock?"

Steve and the sheriff glanced at each other, and Steve grinned briefly.

Not much did they betray themselves, so slight were the glances and the smile; but I caught at the clue.

"I knew we were hunting warm when you fired upon us," I said to Steve. "Of course, you will have to go along and point out the exact spot—one of you. The bank will be notified—and I suppose the sheriff is the proper man to bring it in!" The irony of the thing struck me oddly, just there.

Ellie raised her head again, and moved away from me; but this time she was calm, and seemed to know exactly what she was about. She was not one to indulge in useless recrimination, and I think that it would be hard at any time for a child to bring a parent before the judgment seat. While she had talked pretty plainly to Steve, she seemed to have no words for her father, except one reproachful question.

"Oh, father," she asked impetuously, when she turned to him, "how *could* you do—those things?"

The sheriff looked at her keenly, and not unkindly, for all that she had brought about his downfall. "It depends a lot on how yuh look at things," he said slowly, as if he would like to explain his standard of morality without in any way seeming to apologize for it. "It's against the law—but so are half the things men do. I call it a lot whiter to get out and steal what yuh want, than to graft for it here and there and everywhere. I needed the money. I guess that accounts for the whole thing. Ray spends a lot, and the ranch don't begin to pay for itself, and—oh, it takes money, all right, to live in this world! But I've stole every cent honestly. I——" He saw me smile at the paradox, and hesitated.

"I *mean* that, Walter! I never cheated a man out of two bits in my life. In all the years that I've been sheriff," he declared proudly, "I've never charged the county up with a nickel for expenses that weren't legitimate and necessary. There ain't many sheriffs can say that, and tell the truth. My accounts are straight—yuh can't put your finger on any juggling with figures in *my* office, and I never took a bribe off any man.

"When I wanted more money than I could earn, I got out and stole it like—yes, by glory, like an honest man! I——"

"I don't think," interrupted Ellie wearily, "that we need to argue motives and opinions. The facts are what we have to face; they speak very loudly for themselves, and talking will not alter them. I thought it would be great fun to run down the Dry Ridge gang—I, a girl—and show them I could match wits with them, and win. I—I played it like a new and fascinating game; and now—oh, I can't think of it or talk of it! I wish I were dead!"

"We'd better go home," I said, realizing painfully how she must feel. "We can arrange about that gold—we'll say that Miss Wellcome and I stumbled upon it by accident. It will be nothing unprecedented, if the gang gets off out of the country. I think," I added, rather pointedly, "that it would be a good thing if they did leave. Not too suddenly, perhaps, but still—they ought to leave this neighborhood, and make

their absence permanent. Come, pretty maid—we will go home."

The sheriff went with us, whistling the dogs up from the stable and speaking a word or two to Steve, while I got my horse and Ellie's. The moon was up, by then, and we rode slowly home in the white light of it. As we turned the bend in the trail, I looked back and saw Steve, his tall figure outlined sharply in the light from within, standing in the doorway watching us go.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DRY RIDGE GANG'S LAST MOVE.

I did a lot of thinking during that silent ride. No one spoke at all; we rather drooped in our saddles, I imagine, and let our horses do pretty much as they liked. The sheriff rode with a decided hump in his shoulders and his eyes staring straight before him, and I took to watching him and trying to guess what were his thoughts. I mentally put myself in his place, and wondered what I should do—though I tried to make full allowance for the difference in our natures. For instance, I should have been crushed utterly beneath the weight of guilt discovered. I should have meditated suicide, I think, as the most decent way out.

The sheriff, however, was not thinking of self-destruction. He might be trying to see a way to keep his name clear without giving up the gold—— I flicked the reins on Goldilocks' neck, and set off at a gallop, urged by a sudden conviction that haste was necessary if we would still save that gold.

I rode up to the house, the others following without comment, and dismounted at the very steps. I went in, without even waiting for Ellie, and made straight for the telephone, screwed to the wall inside the hall. They followed me in, and I turned from fumbling the leaves of the directory.

"What's the name of the president of that bank—the one which was robbed?" I asked abruptly.

The sheriff unbuttoned his coat, felt in a pocket, and produced a cigar, which he inspected critically. "Wyman—P. C. I think his number is Red two-one-eight," he answered. "Going to get busy *to-night?*"

I did not reply, but gave the number to central on a chance of its being right. If the sheriff were disposed to lie to me, I might as well find it out at once, while the matter was not important.

A listless masculine voice answered the call, and confessed himself Wyman, president of the Citizens' State Bank. I felt that, to keep the receiver at his ear, I must give him a jolt.

"Mr. Wyman, this is Mr. Tenny, staying with the sheriff. Miss Wellcome and I were out riding, and were fortunate enough to find that gold which was stolen from your bank——"

"Wha-at?" He was not listless now!

"You'd better call up the cashier, or one of the directors," drawled the sheriff, in my other ear. "Wyman's in on the deal—put us wise to that pile, and was to get a share." He actually chuckled. "I'll bet he went straight in the air when he heard that."

I slammed the receiver into the hook, cutting off a babble of questions and exclamations from Wyman. "Give me a number that *will* do business, then!" I snapped at the sheriff.

"Don't get excited—I kinda wanted Wyman to have a hint," he soothed. "He's got a mighty sick wife, and ought to have some show to stand from under, if anything drops. Call up John two-three-two. That's the cashier."

John two-three-two was brisk and snappy and business-like; and when I made my statement again, he asked for particulars. I gave them vaguely, but convincingly.

"Is Sheriff Wellcome at home? He is? May I speak to him at once, please?"

"He wants to talk with the sheriff," I said, and held the receiver out to him. The sheriff grinned sardonically, laid his lighted cigar down, and leaned to the mouthpiece.

"Hello," he rumbled. "Ye-es, this is

Wellcome. Yes, I guess it is—they told me about it after I got in to-night. Sure. Well, I don't know—we'll do all we can, of course. No, I don't think they did. I'll ask Tenny."

Without covering the mouthpiece, he turned gravely to me. "You didn't get sight of the robbers—didn't see any signs of them, did you? You just found the cache?" He was looking from me to the mouthpiece, his face placid and good-humored, but his eyes keenly alert.

"Just the gold," I lied distinctly. "The dogs were nosing around the place, and we got curious, and investigated."

The sheriff nodded, and turned to the telephone. "He says—oh, you heard him, did you? Yes. Yes. Sure, keep it quiet. If they don't get wind of it, some of 'em will show up at the place soon or late. No, they won't leave the country without coming after it. No, not unless they get scared off. Sure. Can you depend on 'em to keep still? Yes. Yes. Sure. How soon? About four miles from here. Yes, good trail all the way. Yes, it *was* kinda nervy—too damned nervy to be safe. All right. Yes, three or four will be enough. Tenny and I will. Why, sure—come armed. And don't forget to load up your guns. Half an hour? An hour? All right—g'-by."

He hung up the receiver, picked up his cigar, looked to see if it were still burning, put it to his lips, and drew a long breath of smoke. "They'll be out here inside of an hour, to go dig it up," he remarked placidly.

I glanced and saw Ellie staring at him, bright-eyed. She went up to him and put her arms around his neck impulsively. "Oh, father! You're—you're—what you are—and I hate and despise you for it. But you are brave—the bravest man I ever knew! I love you for it, father——"

I never saw tears in the sheriff's eyes except that once, and then it was only till he could blink them out. "I've got a pretty brave little girl, too, if yuh ask me," he said, and patted her hair. "Yuh better run along to bed, now, and be careful yuh don't do anything to worry your mother. Be a brave girl, like yuh have been." He kissed her again, and put her gently from him.

"I'm—I'm going along with you," she said, with some of her old firmness. "I've got to go."

Nothing we could say—and we said a good deal while we waited—could move her from her determination. It seemed to me that the sheriff, while he smoked and occasionally tried to persuade Ellie to give up the idea of going with us, was all the time ill at ease—with the uneasiness of preoccupation, and a desire to free himself from the constraint of our presence. That is putting it baldly and awkwardly, but I can do no better.

"Take her out to the kitchen, Walter, and make her get some coffee, or something. She knows how, and we don't want to rout out the cook. That'll steady her, maybe." His eyes were rather intent, his tone urgent. So I took her arm, and whispered to her that I had something to say to her privately. She went with me, and we passed through the dining room to the kitchen, without a word.

"Well, what is it?" she asked dully, when we were inside the kitchen door.

"Wait," I whispered, and tiptoed back through the dining room. At the door which opened directly into the hall—a door which I had purposely left ajar—I stopped and peered through.

The sheriff, telephone receiver pressed against his ear, was leaning again to the mouthpiece. All the will power of the man seemed to be concentrated in his face while he mumbled. I could barely hear the words—and my hearing is rather keen.

"Rural double-two," he murmured. "Rural double-*two*. Ring again. Hurry! Hello. This is—— Yes." He turned his face, so that his eyes might take in the way to the dining room. Behind me, Ellie, quick to grasp the significance of the position I kept, was talking emphatically to the kitchen range. The sheriff caught the monotone of her voice, and turned

back, satisfied. Me he could not see; for I stood in the dark, with one eye to the crack in the door.

"Can you hear me? I got to speak low," he muttered into the phone. "They're going to lift it to-night. Waiting now for a bunch from town with the cashier. Yes. In about an hour. I'll try and kill time on the way. Think yuh can make it alone? Oh, we're safe. They won't let out who it is. Yuh want to be careful. G'-by."

I waited until he had hung up the receiver and picked up his cigar. Then I went back and implored Ellie not to go with us—commanded her, finally, with my arms holding her tight, and my lips——

"But why? I've come so far, and surely there's nothing worse ahead!" The bitterness in her voice! "I want what little satisfaction there is in seeing that gold restored to the owners—the custodians, I should say. Do you—can you imagine what it is to feel that for years you have been fed, and clothed, and housed with stolen money? The dimes and the dollars I've fooled away for candy, and theatres, and all—they have been *stolen!* Even the dress I have on was bought with stolen money, perhaps. I can't live and face it, unless I see that gold pass into the keeping of the bank. Do you think I could stop here and wait—and wait—and keep my senses? Don't you see I've got to go—to do something—until I can adjust myself to the horror of it?"

She stopped, and looked at me queerly. "I suppose it's more lawlessness; but, tell me, anyway, what you were listening for—out *there.* Tell me. You can't ease things by keeping me ignorant—now."

I thought very rapidly, and then I told her. "He was telephoning Steve—I think to get the gold before we did," I whispered. "They don't mean to give that up, if they can help it. I wondered why he—why they gave up so easily. But don't worry," I added. "We'll manage to check that, somehow. We——"

"I shall take the dogs along," she whispered, in a burst of rage against the two. "Oh, have they no shame—no conscience at all? You'd think, after knowing that we know, they would——"

"If they looked at things the way we do, or were susceptible to the same feelings on the subject, they wouldn't be—what they are," I reminded. "Their moral fibre is made of different stuff."

"You mean they haven't any!" she corrected bitterly.

When we went back, five minutes or so later, the sheriff was telephoning again—this time openly, to the cashier, who had evidently rung him up.

"Why, yes," he was saying. "It's going to be a load, and I haven't got a horse on the ranch, just now, that will carry a pack. No, I don't believe you could. No—say, you go or send over to Harmon. He will want to be in on this, anyway, and you tell him to get that little buckskin mare of Ling's. Yes, he'll know. No, it won't take long. I'll call him up, myself, and tell him to get a move on. No, there's no such great rush as that—they won't be nosing around there to-night, I think. I tell yuh—I'll send somebody down there to keep an eye out till we come. Eh? Yes—sure thing. Yes. Ring off! I want to get Harmon on the line. Yes. G'-by."

We stood back and listened, while he, paying absolutely no attention to us, and as calm and business-like as if he were merely arranging to attach some poor devil's personal property for debt, called up another number, and got it.

"Hello," he growled—this time in what I should call his official tone. "This is Wellcome. That you, Joe? Say, we've found that ninety thousand of the bank's, and the cashier is getting a bunch together to come out and take charge of it. Yuh get that? Steady—and listen! Big risk, big profit. Yes. You go and get that little buckskin mare of Ling's to pack it in on. Don't rush off. Say, Harmon, be sure yuh get the details all straight. Understand? My official or-

ders to you as under sheriff. He'll have to let you have her. Well, the rest you get from Farley. He'll be over there directly. It's up to you. Yes, that's the stuff. G'-by."

I had an overwhelming desire to know what that mumbling, far-off voice was saying, so as to piece their plan together. Why must he have the little buckskin mare, and no other? It seemed to me that the crowd might easily manage to carry that gold without a pack horse. I eyed the sheriff sharply and distrustfully, I'm afraid, and repeated mentally, "Big risk, big profit." Was that some secret password, or——

There was no sign of a guilty conscience, or of any secret plot, in the placid face of the sheriff. He tilted his hat back on his head, stretched himself at length in a big chair in the parlor, and composed himself to wait for the party from town. He smoked another cigar; and his eyes were closed more than half the time, as if he were tempted to sleep, but felt that he really ought to keep awake, for the sake of appearance.

The sound of several horsemen clattering into the yard startled him, though my ears had long been strained to catch the first hint of their coming. I think he was displeased. He looked at his watch, and I caught a mutter which sounded like "damned chump" as he got up and settled his hat upon his head. I was relieved that they had come so soon—not more than forty minutes it was that we had waited.

We went out, greeted them briefly, and mounted. Harmon had been too slow, they explained, so they had not waited for the buckskin mare. By a tacit understanding, Ellie and I swung out into the trail in the lead, and set the pace for the others; and though the sheriff said nothing and came pounding along close behind, I feel sure that he would have been glad to see me, at least, fall dead in the trail, if it would have delayed the party appreciably.

Ellie opened the gate for us, in quite her old masterful manner; and we galloped through, and left it swinging in the moonlight. Down the hill and into the shadows—with the sheriff and four others clattering at our heels—I shall not soon forget that night, or that ride to the big rock. We had not brought the dogs, after all. It hardly seemed wise; and they had come out so soon from town that we both felt, in a measure, safe, I think. I had no opportunity for confidential speech with the girl; but she seemed to think with me, and to feel that haste was the only means necessary to guard the gold.

We had nearly reached the rock, when one of the party—a quick-eyed, impulsive fellow, whose name I do not know, leaned forward, raised his gun, and fired. "They're after it—hurry!" he cried, in the same breath.

One shot answered, and two or three fired back from our party. In the shadow by the rock, I saw a man fall and lie still, while we hesitated on the opposite side of the moonlit, open space.

It was the sheriff who plunged across, and dismounted, with what looked—to those town men—like foolhardy courage. He lifted the object, and gave a bellow of rage; then we all crowded around him.

"It's one of the gang!" cried the man who had fired first.

The sheriff, holding the form in his arms, looked up at us. A shaft of moonlight, striking through the trees, whitened his face and made his eyes terrible, shining points of light. "You fools!" he cried, and I felt the purposeful note underlying his apparent excitement. "Do you know what you've done? Shot down Steve Johnson—one of my special deputies! I sent him ahead to keep watch till we got here. You've killed him in cold blood—that's what you've done!" That's the man he was—daring, lawless, and yet loyal to his kind in face of everything.

There was a lot of confusion, and a lot of useless recrimination, when they knew that Steve was dead. I did not stay to hear it out. I was taking Ellie from the place. I must say she's the

bravest girl I ever knew in my life; she did not faint, or scream, or do any of those things sacred to the feminine sex in time of trouble.

I think she was rather dazed by it all, she was so quiet. And if she had been normal, I do not believe I should have found it quite so easy to take her away before the gold was dug up, or Steve carried home, or anything done but a lot of gabbling.

The rest of the story can well be told in a few words; for what had gone before merely worked itself out naturally, with time to help smooth the rough places.

No one save the sheriff and Ellie and I ever knew what really did take Steve into the Bend ahead of our party, and not even the sheriff knew that I had overheard, and so could piece together the truth. He never once mentioned the matter to me, or intimated that he knew I must have some suspicions on the subject. The killing went for an accident, pure and simple; and I imagine that poor fellow who fired first is still blaming himself for his impulsiveness, when, in reality, he did Steve a good turn.

Ray came back from his honeymoon trip, and within an hour all was serene between him and his "dad"—and it was about that time when I started on one of my own, with Ellie for the bride.

The sheriff drew me aside, just as I was about to follow her on board the train. "Maybe it'll do yuh good to hear the news, Walter," he said, in his usual placid manner. "I've sent in my resignation as sheriff, and soon as I can get rid of what stuff I can *honestly* call my own, I'm going to beat it out uh here, and start in fresh, somewhere else. That," he added whimsically, "is my wedding present to you and Ellie. I—I appreciate what yuh did—or didn't do—when yuh had the chance; and, to prove it, I'm going to make good traveling the straight trail. It ain't always by sending men over the road that yuh cure 'em uh crime. Sometimes yuh do more good by letting 'em have another chance.

"You tell Ellie that. Yuh know, we haven't been speaking to each other since—but when she sees I've made good, maybe she'll not feel quite so hard toward her old dad. I ain't asking for no forgiveness—I'm going to make good without—— Oh, hop on there, before yuh get left! So-long—good luck to yuh!"

ABOUT BALLOONS

SO far as is known, no balloon has ever remained in the air for more than fifty-four hours at a stretch, or traveled more than one thousand miles, or lifted any living person more than seven miles above the earth's surface. Unmanned balloons, however, have attained to an altitude of fifteen miles.

The greatest danger of a high ascent is concerned with the changing density of the atmosphere. On the ground, the atmosphere presses on the balloon with a weight of about fifteen pounds for every square inch of its surface. As the balloon rises, however, the air grows thinner; and its pressure becomes, in consequence, less and less. As the pressure of the outside atmosphere decreases, the balloon expands; and, if the ascension is made too rapidly, or without sufficient care, the gas inside the silk envelope will expand until the balloon bursts.

But the bursting of a balloon in midair is by no means necessarily a fatal catastrophe. Every balloon is provided with a "ripping cord," which, when pulled, cuts a long rent in the envelope, out of which the gas speedily escapes. The silk bag is then carried by the air into the upper portion of the netting, where, in the majority of cases, it forms a parachute, and brings everything safely to earth.

A Dozen Eggs

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Come-On," "Publicity Work," Etc.

A little thing may make one man laugh; but only really great humor can stir the risibilities of the whole world. No one—and this includes the chronic grouch—could possibly fail to be amused by the naked humor of this story. Possibly the reason for this is that the circumstances herein set forth may at any time happen to you or to your neighbor, in which case it will be well for you to call in a dozen lawyers and the most noted mathematician in your neighborhood. Otherwise the dispute can never be settled

PATTLING with a howling January gale, her ample skirts slatting and fluttering like the leech of a foresail before it fills, Mrs. Michael Maloney laid a course for Slattery's grocery. In one hand she bore a market basket; the other was fully occupied with the skirts aforesaid, which developed an alarming tendency to balloon. Balked in this immodest inclination, they went to the other extreme, wrapped themselves tightly in impromptu *directoire* fashion around the nether limbs of their mistress, and brought her to a halt.

Mrs. Maloney set down the basket, unwrapped the clinging garments, caught up the basket again, made a short tack and a long one, and plunged, pink of cheek and breathless, into the shelter of the store entrance. There she smoothed her ruffled attire, adjusted her hat, settled the basket on her arm, and, entering the store, proceeded to make her week-end purchases.

Slattery's grocery was always as neat as the proverbial new pin. There was a place for everything; and, if anything was out of place, old Slattery fired the person responsible, if he could find him. If he could not, he fired some one, on general principles. Certain things were always to be had at certain counters, and certain articles were displayed in certain immutable ways. The established order never varied. Thus, at the dairy counter, the cheese was flanked on the right by rolls of butter, and on the left by piles of eggs.

But on this Saturday morning eggs were scarce. Instead of the usual piles of white, brown, and speckled hen products, there were twelve eggs, and no more, reposing forlornly in a shallow wooden box, above which was a card, announcing that the price was sixty cents the dozen.

Mrs. Maloney paused and regarded them thoughtfully, speculating on the possibility of a bargain. But the usual clerk was not there. In his place was a pert-looking youth, a stranger to her, whose manner advertised supreme contempt for a customer who carried a market basket.

"What kind iv eggs is thim?" she asked.

"Hens' eggs," replied the clerk flippantly. He was of the tack-headed variety, new at Slattery's, and unacquainted with Mrs. Maloney; also, he had been up late the night before.

The lady surveyed him with scorn. "Are they, now?" she said, in pretended astonishment. Then, with sarcasm: "Are ye sure iv ut? 'Tis har-rd to believe that Misther Slattery would set a clever young man loike ye to sell common hens' eggs. Is they no chance iv their bein' ducks', or ostriches', or killalloo bur-rds'?"

"No, ma'am," replied the clerk uneasily, conscious that he had made a mistake in his customer. "They're just plain hens' eggs, ma'am."

"You're not long here, and you've a lot to learn," said Mrs. Maloney tolerantly. "Misther Slattery kapes fo-our kinds iv eggs—case eggs, which will fry sometimes; fresh eggs, which will boil sometimes; far-rmers eggs, which is thim a far-rmer would rather sell than ate himself; an' new-laid eggs."

"Oh, I see," said the clerk, with comprehension. "Yes, ma'am; these are new laid, and they're all we have of any kind. We won't be able to get any more before next week. Eggs are mighty scarce, just now. Will you take the dozen?"

Mrs. Maloney set the basket on the counter, and considered. Sixty cents was an awful price; Michael's wages did not warrant such extravagance. But, on the other hand, he liked a boiled egg for breakfast on Sunday morning, and so did the children. That settled the matter.

"I'll take thim," she announced; and thereupon the eggs were transferred to the market basket.

Late that Saturday afternoon, as she sat by the window, mending sundry well-worn family garments, she beheld a lady approaching.

"Now, th' saints be good till us," said Mrs. Maloney to herself. "W'u'd ye luk at the shtyle iv that Nora Cassidy since her man got his foreman's job! A hat th' size iv th' basket she used to carry her washin' in, an' wan iv thim Impire dresses! An' her wid no more curves till her shape nor a slat!"

Mrs. Cassidy ascended the steps, and rang the doorbell. Nature, which had denied her curves, had given her a square, determined mouth, a pair of belligerent eyes, of the purest Irish blue, and a tongue of vitriolic potentialities. She cherished social aspirations; and, since the improvement in her husband's position and pay had assumed toward her old acquaintances a patronizing manner which they found extremely hard to bear. Her greeting was gushing and airy; her glance, as she seated herself, rested disapprovingly on Mrs. Maloney's sewing.

"Busy as iver, I see," she commented. "An' how have ye been, this long time past?"

"Well—barrin' a touch iv a cowld airly in the month," answered Mrs. Maloney. "It left me weak as a rag, wid no ambition to be up an' doin'. Have ye iver felt that way?"

"Indade, an' I have," replied Mrs. Cassidy. "It was the lay grip ye had. I was that bad wid it that Terence brought in Docther Phelan to see me. 'Mrs. Cassidy,' he says, says he, 'yer system is run down, and needs tonin' up. Ye must not think iv anny manner iv house wur-ruk for weeks; an', more nor that, ye must cancel yer soshul engagemints, or I will not be answerable for the consequinces. 'Tis burnin' th' candle at both ends at wanst ye've been doin'. A warmer climate, an' complete rest, is what ye need. But, annyways,' he says, 'ye must cut out the giddy whirl,' he says."

"An' did ye?" asked Mrs. Maloney, with faint irony.

"I tried," said Mrs. Cassidy, in martyr-like tones. "But ye have no notion how hard 'tis to do, whin gayeties has become a habit wid ye, an' people depends on ye. 'Tis yerself is lucky to be able to lead th' simple life, Mrs. Maloney, ma'am. Annyways, follyin' Docther Phelan's advice, I missed Mrs. Maher-O'Rourke's dance, th' christenin' iv Monahan's youngest, an' ould Jimmy Kinsella's wake. But, in sympathizin' wid yez about the lay grip, I do be forgettin' me errand. Can ye lend me the loan iv a dozen eggs, Mrs. Maloney, ma'am?"

Mrs. Maloney hesitated. To lend the eggs would be to deprive her husband and children of their Sunday-morning treat; and Mrs. Cassidy's airs were very hard to bear. But, then, she was a neighbor.

"'Tis har-rd to get eggs, now," she temporized.

"'Tis so," Mrs. Cassidy agreed, "or it's meself w'u'd not be troublin' ye. But niver th' fresh eggs can I get at ayther Slattery's or Quinn's; an' Ter-

ence's two sisthers an' their young men comin' to-morra day, an' sorra th' bite iv cake in the house. Not that I'd be carin' if they was me own folks; but, bein' me man's, 'tis like they'd talk. Ye know how it is wid yer husband's family—foriver lookin' for a chance to find fault wid the way ye feed him, or kape his clothes mended, or dress the childher!"

Mrs. Maloney recognized the gravity of the situation. "W'u'd th' half iv a dozen do?" she asked.

"They w'u'd not," replied Mrs. Cassidy, with decision. "The cake recipay calls for foive; an' two for white sauce for a fish is sivin; an' t'ree more har-rd boiled for a salad is eleven or twelve."

Mrs. Maloney listened grimly to the recital of these delicacies. "Is ut a party ye're givin'?" she commented.

"Be no manner iv manes," replied Mrs. Cassidy airily. "Nawthin' but a plain, light Sundah meal, as ye can see. Of co-ourse, if ye had company comin' yerself, I'd not be askin' ye for the eggs. I'll return thim the beginnin's iv the week."

Mrs. Maloney sighed. Since Mrs. Cassidy had urgent need of the eggs, Mike and the children would have to go without. She adjusted her mind to the sacrifice. "I'll just step to the kitchen for thim," she said.

She packed the precious eggs securely in a small tin pail, shut down the cover, and returned to her visitor. To her resentful astonishment, Mrs. Cassidy removed the cover, and frankly counted the eggs.

"There's twelve in ut," said Mrs. Maloney grimly.

"That's all," said Mrs. Cassidy calmly.

"An' is they more nor twelve to a dozen since I wint to school?" asked Mrs. Maloney, in dangerous tones.

" 'Tis har-rd to say what they taught, thim days," said Mrs. Cassidy sweetly.

"Indade!" snorted Mrs. Maloney indignantly. " 'Tw'u'd give some people trouble to say what anny school taught. Tell me why ye counted thim eggs, Mrs. Cassidy!"

"Sure, I thought ye might be cheatin' yerself," explained Mrs. Cassidy, with apparent frankness.

"Not likely—an' thim sixty cents a dozen," said Mrs. Maloney, still ruffled. "I *bought* thim!" She accented the word.

Mrs. Cassidy flushed slightly. "Is it not airly to put Misther Maloney and the childher into spring underclothes, Mrs. Maloney?" she asked innocently.

"It is; an' I have not," answered Mrs. Maloney, puzzled by the apparent change of subject. "Thim's winter." She waved her hand at the scattered garments undergoing repairs.

"Ye don't tell me!" commented Mrs. Cassidy, in assumed surprise. "Sure, I tuk thim for spring weight, they're worn that thin." Possibly prompted by the expression of the other lady's face, she added, a trifle hastily: "Well, I must be goin' 'Tis neighborly av ye to lend me the eggs, Mrs. Maloney. Thank ye kindly for the same."

Mrs. Maloney watched the visitor's departure with what was almost a scowl on her usually good-humored face. "The blessid Saint Bridget knows I hope ye choke on thim," she muttered. "Th' impidence av her, that was born a gutther-snipe iv a Lannegan! Her, wid her foive-egg recipays an' har-rd-boiled salads! Neighborly iv me, is ut? I niver felt less so in me life!"

On the following morning, Michael Maloney, in Sabbath comfort of shirt sleeves and no collar, sat down to breakfast. Being blessed with a healthy appetite, he put his porridge and milk out of sight with practiced celerity, and followed it with three slices of golden-brown bacon.

"An' now I'll have me egg," he announced, leaning back in comfortable anticipation. "It's glad I'll be when the cowld weather's over, an' th' hins starts in ag'in to hould down their jobs." For Michael was very fond of eggs.

"Ye'll get no egg this day," said his wife shortly.

"Why not?" demanded her husband. When he heard why, he was not pleased.

"I am not presentin' anny Cassidy

that iver lived wid eggs at foive cents each!" he said angrily. "Let thim buy their own. Sixty cints in eggs wasted on Cassidys! Ye should have had bether sinse!"

"Sure, I only loaned her the eggs, Mike," said his wife. "I hated to; but what else c'u'd I do, her pullin' a poor mouth about company comin', an' th' loikes? She'll bring thim back this week, bad scran till her."

"Mebbe she will," said Michael darkly. "I'll belave ut whin I see the eggs. Thim Cassidys is the curse iv the world —foriver borryin', an' niver payin' back!"

As time went on, his wife came to agree with him. For Mrs. Cassidy did not return the eggs. A week passed—two, three, and four. Even when the days lengthened and warmed with the advent of March, the debt continued. Every night, when he came home from work, Maloney asked his wife one question, and received one reply. Then he would comment: "I told ye so." Which did not improve his wife's temper. He could not forget that eggless Sunday breakfast; nor could she forget Mrs. Cassidy's envenomed words—words savoring of rank ingratitude, as she considered them, under the circumstances.

"Go over an' ax her for thim, why don't ye?" said Michael, one night.

"I will not," replied his wife. "W'u'd I lower meself to go thrapesin' into a Cassidy's dirty kitchen for a dozen iv eggs? I w'u'd not. Let her be. She'll bring thim back in her own time. The longer she waits, the more they is comin' to her."

"An' what's comin' to her?" said Maloney. "Is ut a lady foight?" He contemplated his wife's splendid physique with satisfaction. "Go aisy, then, Kate. The Cassidy woman is a slip iv a thing. If ye mishandle her, 'tis like I'll have to bate th' head off iv Cassidy, too. Not that I'd mind."

"I w'u'd not soil me hands wid her," said Mrs. Maloney.

When she met the delinquent, all was peace and apparent good will. Eggs were never mentioned. She was at pains to be elaborately polite, and endured Mrs. Cassidy's unaltered patronizing manner with outward calm. The dozen seemed to have passed out of the latter lady's recollection entirely.

And so matters stood upon the seventeenth of March. On the morning of that day, Mrs. Maloney, hanging out clothes in her back yard, beheld Mrs. Cassidy approaching.

Mrs. Cassidy was clad entirely in green. On her head was a wonderful green hat with a superstructure of foliage and feathers, and from it green streamers blew out in the fresh breeze; her dress was shamrock colored; her hands were gloved with green kid; and she carried a green parasol. Against this emerald background, the huge bunch of shamrocks pinned at her breast was inconspicuous.

Mrs. Maloney surveyed the verdant vision with an ominous tightening of the lips. Plainly, Mrs. Cassidy was bound downtown to witness the parade; but in her hand she bore a small tin pail, and Mrs. Maloney knew that the hour of reckoning had come.

Mrs. Cassidy, happily conscious of her finery, reached the fence, and beamed above it at Mrs. Maloney.

"Good morning, Mrs. Maloney," she said, in her most patronizing manner. "An' are ye not going downtown for to see the Sons iv Erin march?"

"I am not," said Mrs. Maloney coldly.

"'Twill be the grand sight," pursued Mrs. Cassidy.

"I can live widout ut," said Mrs. Maloney.

Mrs. Cassidy waited for admiring comment on her apparel, but none came. "I see ye lookin' at me frock," she hinted.

"Aw, if ut's yer dhriss ye mane, I see ut," said Mrs. Maloney grimly.

"I had ut made special for the day," babbled Mrs. Cassidy, throwing a glance of self-admiration downward. "Green does be tryin' to some complexions. Tell me, d'ye think it becomin'?"

"Wid your complexion, it does not matter what ye wear," commented Mrs.

Maloney. "For ye'd look like the divil in annything," she added, to herself.

Something in her tone made Mrs. Cassidy regard her suspiciously. "I must be on me way," she said. "Here's the dozen iv eggs I borryed from ye th' other day, wid me best thanks for the same."

Mrs. Maloney made no motion to take them. "An' did ye borry a dozen th' other day?" she asked innocently. "I disremimber. W'u'd ut be last week, now?"

"Longer ago nor that," admitted Mrs. Cassidy, a shade of red stealing into her face. "Annyways, here they are."

Still Mrs. Maloney did not take the tin pail. "Sure, now, I do remimber something! W'u'd ut be thim ye had of me crowdin' eight weeks gone?"

"It might be," replied Mrs. Cassidy. "I was meanin' for to return thim sooner; but it slipped me mind, what wid me soshul engagements an' duties."

"'Twas a Saturdah afternoon in Janooary," said Mrs. Maloney, "an' ye borryed a dozen eggs, costin' sixty cints, from me. Do these be thim?"

"Thim's thim," answered Mrs. Cassidy shortly, an angry glare lighting in her belligerent, blue eyes.

Mrs. Maloney took the tin pail, and removed the cover. One by one she lifted the eggs, counting aloud, and laid them in a row on the top stringer of the fence.

"Twelve eggs I make ut," she announced. "Am I right, or am I wrong?"

"Twelve ut is," answered Mrs. Cassidy. "Twelve eggs—wan dozen, naythor more nor less. An' now I must be goin', havin' paid me debt."

"Hould on a minute," said Mrs. Maloney. "Where's the rest iv thim eggs, Mrs. Cassidy?"

Mrs. Cassidy paused, and counted the eggs again. Undoubtedly, there were twelve of them; and she said so.

"An' I'm not denyin' ut," said Mrs. Maloney. "But where's the rest?"

"What rest?" demanded the other. "Forninst ye on the fence they does be wan dozen iv eggs—twelve. I borryed a dozen. We do be square, I'm thinkin'."

"Twelve eggs they may be, an' wan dozen they may be; but square we do not be," said Mrs. Maloney.

"Why not?" asked Mrs. Cassidy sharply. "Wan dozen is twelve—two times six, t'ree times four, or four times t'ree. Can ye make ut anny different?"

"'Tis the foine head for figgers ye have!" sneered Mrs. Maloney. "Then here's another sum for ye. Whin ye borryed the eggs, they cost sixty cints a dozen. This blessed day they do be down to twinty cints. Twinty into sixty goes t'ree times, an' nawthin' over. So, Mrs. Terence Cassidy, ye owe me sixty cints' worth iv eggs, or t'ree dozen—as ye can prove be the arithmetic they l'arned ye at the charity school, whin ye was a Lannegan!"

Mrs. Cassidy's features hardened. "I niver heard the loikes!" she exclaimed. "Wan dozen I borryed, an' wan dozen I return—good, fresh eggs, every wan."

"Sixty cints' worth iv eggs ye borryed, an' twinty ye bring back," said Mrs. Maloney. "Which leaves ye owin' forty."

"A dozen eggs is a dozen eggs," said Mrs. Cassidy.

"An' sixty cints is sixty cints," said Mrs. Maloney, with determination. "Sixty cints ye got from me in eggs; sixty cints, in eggs or coin, I will have for the same!"

Mrs. Cassidy tossed her burdened head so that the green foliage and feathers shook. "Will ye so?" she said. "See now, Kate Maloney, when I borryed the eggs, I borryed wan dozen."

"Costin' sixty cints," added Mrs. Maloney.

"L'ave that be for a minit, can't ye?" said the debtor impatiently. "Wan dozen I asked for, an' wan dozen I got. Then I owed ye a dozen, didn't I?"—

"Or sixty cints," said the creditor.

"Th' divil fly away wid the sixty cints!" cried Mrs. Cassidy, exasperated. "Did I owe ye then for wan dozen, or two, or three? Answer me that?"

"Wan dozen," admitted Mrs. Maloney; "but——"

"There ye are, then!" interrupted Mrs. Cassidy. "I owed ye wan dozen bekase I borryed wan dozen, which same lies on the fince beneath yer nose!"

"It's the desavin' tongue ye have!" said Mrs. Maloney hotly. "Thim eggs cost me sixty cints. When ye borryed thim, ye the same as tuk sixty cints out of me pocket. Whin ye puts back wan dozen, worth only twinty cints, I goes shy forty cints. Which I will not do for you, Nora Cassidy, nor for anny one else. Ye will cough up sixty cints, or t'ree dozen eggs, or ye will take th' consequinces!"

"The consequinces, is ut?" cried Mrs. Cassidy, abandoning restraint, and giving free reign to her tongue. "I'll take all thim ye have to offer, Mrs. Shylock-Maloney. A dozen iv eggs lies on yer fince, which is all I owe—an' all ye get. I am not to be dhruv into givin' ye more by anny talk iv consequinces from a flat-futted lump iv a Mullingar heifer! I wish ye good day, ma'am."

With the concluding words, she turned her back, tossed her head, and began to walk away. This was a tactical error. The temptation was too great to be successfully resisted.

"The blessed saints know I wish ut was th' half iv a brick!" whispered Mrs. Maloney softly, to herself, as her hand closed on an egg.

Drawing back her arm, she threw with the accuracy of a high-salaried infielder. The missile struck squarely between Mrs. Cassidy's shoulders, and, exploding bomblike, insulted the green of Erin with orange streaks.

Mrs. Cassidy gave one backward glance of startled horror; then, realizing the nature and extent of the outrage, she leaped back to do battle. She was met by a fusillade of eggs. They smashed and splashed upon the green spring dress, the green hat, the green parasol, and the green gloves. In five seconds, the costume of which she had been so proud was covered with fragments of shells and messy, trickling yolks; it was ruined beyond repair. Then the foe ran out of ammunition. With a furious battle cry of undefiled Irish, Nora Cassidy flourished the once green parasol, and charged the fence.

Grimly Mrs. Maloney stood to the attack, welcoming the shock of arms. When the assailant came within reach, she seized her in a mighty grip. And it might have gone hard with Mrs. Cassidy, had not Officer Dennis Ryan, leisurely patrolling his beat, appeared on the scene of conflict.

"Leddies, leddies!" said the scandalized Ryan, interposing his bulk between them. "What kind iv goin's on is these, now?" He was a mutual acquaintance; and, although his mouth was stern, a twinkle grew in his eyes.

"I'll have her life!" cried Mrs. Cassidy. "Arrist her, Dennis Ryan! Luk what she done to me dress!"

"And in wan minit more ye'd have had no dhriss to shpake iv," said Mrs. Maloney. "I'd have sent ye home in an ash bar'l, ye cheatin', thrapesin' cockatoo bur-rd!"

"Tut, tut!" said Ryan. "Remimber, leddies, ye're speakin' in the prisince iv a gentleman. Control yer language."

"Arrist her!" insisted Mrs. Cassidy.

"Sure, I'll arrist nobody but a Protestant this blessid day," said Ryan. "What's ut all about, annyhow?"

When he was told, disjointedly, and with many interruptions, he removed his helmet and scratched his curly head. "If wan dozen eggs at sixty cints is the same as t'ree dozen at twinty cints, only two dozen different, I dunno how old Anne is at all, at all," he said. "Annyways, 'tis a civil case, which I have nawthin' to do wid. Me job is to keep the peace, an' both iv yez are now peaceful—or more so than ye wor. Come, Mrs. Cassidy, ma'am; if ye have no objections, I'll escort ye home."

Michael Maloney heard the news from the front, that evening, with a sober face.

"Ye done wrong," he announced coldly. "Not that ye wor not right about the eggs; ye wor. But ye should not

have shpoilt her dress. That I will have to pay for."

"Will that be the law, Mike?" asked his wife. Her anger had cooled quickly, and was replaced by contrition.

"I knows little about the law, thank God," replied Maloney piously. "But ye t'run the first egg. It stands to reason."

When the doorbell rang, later in the evening, he was not altogether surprised to see Terence Cassidy.

"Can I have a word wid ye, Maloney?" the latter asked.

"Come in," invited Maloney.

"No," Cassidy refused. "What I have to say will be betther said elsewhere."

"Just as ye like," said Maloney, accepting the inevitable. "Mebbe I won't be needin' me coat?"

"'Tis not a fight I'm afther," said Cassidy coldly. "There's been enough iv that already. Come down to Cloran's, till we talk this over sinsible."

When they reached Cloran's, Cassidy led the way to a quiet corner table, and gave an order. They drank to each other with diplomatic formality.

"We've known each other this long time, Maloney," said Cassidy. "It'd be a pity if what's happened was to make a difference bechune us."

"So it w'u'd," Michael agreed. "'Tis too thriflin' a matter for sinsible men to quar'l about."

"'Tis so," said Cassidy. "We must make allowances f'r what the ladies done. Ivery married man knows that women is flighty, hy-sterical, an' eemotional. They do be actin' on the impulse iv the moment, an' lackin' in ballast. Now, men is different—calmer, more saner, an' judicial-minded. Am I right, Maloney?"

"Ye ar-re," Michael concurred. "All histh'ry is wid ye, Cassidy. From Cleopatra down to Carrie Nation, it proves the prisince iv th' microbat iv destruction in women; they desthroy, but they do not build up. An' it proves, also, that we has the judicial qualities iv mind which they lacks. Thank Hiven, we can argy a point widout losin' our timpers. We will discuss this matther calmly. Ye will now have another beer wid me."

"'Tis a pleasure to talk to an intilligent man like yerself," said Cassidy. "Now, in the first place, as a di-rect raysult iv that feminine microbat iv desthructiveness ye was shpakin' iv, a moment gone, there is wan green dress an' wan hat an' thrimmin's iv Mrs. Cassidy's teetotally disthroyed an' gone to the divil."

"So I'm told," Maloney admitted freely. "I'm sorry for ut; an' I am ready to pay for the same, widout prejudice to what a steam cl'aner can do."

"That's very fair an' dacint," said Cassidy. "It's what I'd expect from a man like yersilf, Michael. It shows th' benefits iv calm discussion, an' how the masculine mind, wid its sinse iv justice, rises sooperior to thriflin' feminine quar'ls. And, now, about thim eggs. Of course, whin Mrs. Cassidy tuk back wan dozen to Mrs. Maloney, they was square ag'in."

"I look at ut diff'rent," said Michael. "Back in the winther, eggs was sixty cints. They be now twinty. So, to be square, Mrs. Cassidy should return t'ree dozen."

"What differ' does ut make what they was in the winther?" said Cassidy. "Ain't a dozen a dozen?"

"A dozen that costs me sixty cints is diff'runt from a dozen that costs ye twinty cints," argued Maloney.

"They weigh the same," insisted Cassidy. "Ye buyed thim to ate, didn't ye? An' is there not as much atin' in a dozen eggs, now, as there was then?"

"Sure, I don't know about that," returned Michael. "I niver had the chance to ate ayther dozen."

"An' is that my fault?" asked Cassidy sharply.

"Ye borryed the eggs, didn't ye?" retorted Michael, with equal asperity.

"An' returned thim!" snapped Cassidy.

"Afther eight weeks—yis!" sneered Maloney.

For a moment they glared at each other. Then, with painful politeness

and forced calm, they went over the ground again. At the end of ten minutes of the same arguments, the deadlock was unbroken. Both men became vehement. Cassidy pounded the table with his fist.

"I tuk ye for a sinsible man!" he cried. "Can't ye see that wan dozen is wan dozen, winther or summer, sixty cints or twinty cints?"

"They may be whin ye borry thim, but not whin ye pay out cold coin for the same—which ye did not," retorted Maloney. "Wan dozen at sixty cints is worth t'ree dozen at twinty cints. 'Tis child's ilimentary arithmetic. Anny domn fool knows ut."

"Like enough," returned Cassidy. "I'll waste no more time arguin' wid wan."

"I'll take that from no Cassidy that iver worked on a dhrain!" gritted Michael, jumping to his feet. "I'll pay for no dress! Sixty cints or t'ree dozen eggs I will have, if I have to take ut to co-ourt! An', Terence Cassidy, I can lick ye the best day ye iver saw!"

"Ye're a liar, an' I'll have the law on ye for the dress!" shouted Cassidy, and reached for him.

The table went over, with a crash of breaking beer glasses. The peace conference was undoubtedly ended, and rough house was imminent. It was a case for intervention.

Cloran's head man leaped the bar, with practiced celerity, and pushed between them. "Cut it out!" he commanded tersely. "If youse two Micks want to spoil each other, do it outside, see! Beat it, now!"

But when they found themselves ignominiously propelled toward the door, the desire for physical combat vanished.

"I'll have the law on ye!" threatened Cassidy again, when they reached the street.

"Go to the divil!" retorted Maloney. "The law, is ut? 'Tis little the loikes iv you knows about law, nor annything else!"

Cassidy lost no time in carrying out his threat. In the morning, he was at McKenna's law office before the attorney. When the latter arrived, Cassidy, with wealth of circumstance, began to state his case. McKenna, who was a busy man, cut him short, got the meat of the matter in three pointed questions, and leaned back in his chair.

"If you want my best advice," he said, "you'll go to Maloney, pay him for his eggs if he'll pay you for the dress, and keep out of court."

"I'll niver pay for thim eggs," said Cassidy, with determination. "Ye don't say the law's agin' me, do ye, Misther McKenna?"

"No, not the law. Merely common sense," said McKenna. "I'm showing you the best and cheapest way."

"I won't pay for thim," Cassidy repeated. "There does be a principle involved, Misther McKenna. An', then, he said I worked on a dhrain."

"Oh, well, if you want to fight, that's what I'm here for," said McKenna. He touched a bell. "Miss Brown," he said to his stenographer, "please take down this gentleman's statement—make it brief, Cassidy—and then write a letter to Maloney, covering the facts, and threatening suit in default of payment in two days, and make a memo. to issue the writ if not settled by then. That's all, thank you. Good morning, Cassidy."

And he forgot the matter until late the next day, when Jimmy Dolan, a young attorney who occupied an office on the same floor, strolled in, a letter in his hand.

"Maloney came in to see me about this letter of yours," said Dolan. "He refuses to settle; he's going to see it through."

"Maloney? Maloney?" said McKenna, trying to recollect. "Oh, yes, I remember. Well, we'll sue him, then. Did you tell him he was a fool?"

"Sure," replied Dolan, who had endeavored, without success, to impress that fact on the litigious Maloney. "He'll have to pay for the dress and things, of course; he knows it. But he won't pay a cent for damages, and he insists on some ridiculous counter claim for two or three dozen eggs.

How about those eggs, Mac? That's what he's hot about."

"Oh, hang the eggs!" said McKenna. "Cassidy gave him back his dozen. There's no more coming to him."

"I'm not so sure," said Dolan.

"Well, I am," said McKenna positively. "It's obvious. You don't mean to say you'll argue that point seriously? The whole affair is a farce, anyway. I hate to be mixed up in a three-cent action, like this, and I wouldn't touch it—only that Cassidy's influence may mean votes to me, some day."

"Lucky to be you," commented Dolan. "I take what I can get, but I don't get near enough. Well, I suppose we'll have to put it up to Beekman. How will next Tuesday suit you?"

Beekman was judge of the minor causes court, and he was not popular. Many of the cases which it was his fate to try made him exceedingly tired, and he did not scruple to say so. He held the heretical opinion that a lawyer's duty was to adjust differences, if possible, without recourse to the courts; and his remarks from the bench to certain members of the profession, whose actions appeared to indicate a contrary belief, were often extremely caustic. His merciless tongue was just as ready to scarify a prominent lawyer as a struggling beginner; in fact, he enjoyed it more. He was impatient of suits brought on trifling grounds. They were his chief abhorrence; and on counsel engaged therein he emptied his vials of choicest sarcasm. Therefore, neither McKenna nor Dolan enjoyed the prospect.

"I suppose we'll have to," said the former reluctantly. "He'll make a few juicy comments, as usual, of course."

"You bet he will," said Dolan, with a grin. "I'm sorry for you, Mac. He always goes for the plaintiff's attorney?"

"Huh!" grunted McKenna. "Your man won't settle, you say?"

"Not a chance," Dolan assured him.

"Well, there's no dispute about the facts," said McKenna, after a moment's thought. "Suppose we agree not to put in evidence, but merely state the facts to old Beek for his decision. That ought to please him, and shut off some of his confounded sulphuric tongue."

"All right. I'll go you, if you think he'll stand for it," said Dolan. "But, at that, I'll let you do the stating, Mac."

Judge Beekman was in his most sarcastic mood. A couple of his decisions had been upset by a higher court, whose judge was an old enemy; he had slept badly; the room was stuffy, and he had a headache; the list of cases was long, and the earlier ones dragged, in spite of his efforts. Therefore, when Cassidy versus Maloney was called, he was in need of a safety valve.

From opposite sides of the courtroom, the Cassidys and Maloneys exchanged glances of defiance. Between them, in the space reserved for counsel, sat their respective champions, McKenna and Dolan. McKenna shot an occasional uneasy glance at the autocrat of the bench, reading the signs of coming storm with an experienced eye. Not that he was easily rattled; far from it. But the gift of repartee which stops just short of contempt of court is possessed by few counsel; and no one likes to contemplate the prospect of being hammered without a chance to hit back.

"Now, then; now, then," said Judge Beekman brusquely. "Cassidy versus Maloney. I would once more remind counsel that, while eternity waits for all, time waits for none. Who appears for the plaintiff? I will dis——"

"I am for the plaintiff, y'r honor!" said McKenna hastily.

Dolan shot up like a jumping-jack, murmured: "For the defendant, y'r honor," and subsided.

"Mr. McKenna for plaintiff; Mr. Dolan for defendant," said Judge Beekman. "Very well. Get on, Mr. McKenna—get on. What are you waiting for?"

"We are ready to proceed," said McKenna.

"Then why don't you?" barked Beekman. "Some courts I could name have more time than business. That condition is reversed here. Please remember it."

"Certainly, y'r honor," said McKenna suavely. "It is with that fact in mind, and in order to expedite the business of the court, that me learned friend and myself have agreed to offer no evidence in the present matter; but, with your honor's consent, to state a case for your honor's decision. The facts are clear and undisputed. Me learned friend will confirm me in this."

Dolan bowed assent.

"In an experience of some thousands of cases, I have never before met one in which the facts were both clear and undisputed," said Judge Beekman. "I congratulate you both on the discovery. And I want to know what you bring such a case into court for? Why don't you settle it outside?"

"Because we are all desirous that your honor should apply the law to the undisputed facts," explained McKenna patiently.

"Do you mean to say that two lawyers, with undisputed facts before them, can't agree on the law?" asked the judge.

"Well, we are substantially agreed," said McKenna. "Realizing, as your honor points out, that this might be a proper case for settlement out of court, we have already advised that course; but our clients would not consider it."

"In other words, they refused to take your advice," said Judge Beekman. "And instead of throwing up the case, then and there, as you should have done, you bring an action, practically on the advice of your clients, and against your own judgment. The legal profession of this city has come to a pretty pass, when two of its members unblushingly admit such a thing! Proceed, Mr. McKenna, since you have come so far on the wrong path."

"The facts are these," said McKenna, who was wise enough to take his medicine with a pleasant face. "On or about the sixth day of January, the wife of the defendant bought one dozen eggs, paying therefor sixty cents. On the same date, the plaintiff's wife borrowed them from her, promising to return one dozen in a few days. She did not do so until the seventeenth day of March, on which date the retail price of eggs was twenty cents a dozen. The defendant's wife refused to accept one dozen in satisfaction of the debt, demanding three dozen, or, in the alternative, sixty cents. Thereupon, they had some heated words, and the defendant's wife smashed the entire dozen eggs, one by one, *seriatim* and willfully, upon the person of the plaintiff's wife, thereby ruining a new dress and other apparel of the latter's, and causing her a certain amount of inconvenience, physical discomfort, and mental anguish. This action is brought for the value of the garments, unstated damages for assault, and for a declaration that the tender of one dozen eggs on the seventeenth day of March satisfied the debt."

McKenna sat down, somewhat relieved to be through with his unpleasant task.

Judge Beekman glared. "And you want me to assess the lady's 'physical discomfort and mental anguish,' and tell you the value of one smashed dozen of eggs on March seventeenth?" he growled.

"Precisely, y'r honor," said McKenna.

"It is a pity that the lamented King Solomon is no more," said Judge Beekman, with sarcasm. "I fear that my modest abilities will be sorely taxed. Mr. Dolan, what light has your intellect to shed on this matter?"

"The facts are as stated by me learned friend," said Dolan. "We are ready to pay for the dress and other garments. But we say that the tender of a dozen eggs worth twenty cents is not satisfaction of a debt of a dozen worth sixty cents. We claim the market value of the original dozen at the time they were bought, or three dozen at the present market price."

"Is that your only point of difference?" demanded Judge Beekman. Both lawyers agreed that it was.

"So that," the judge began ominously, "the amount involved in this action is the difference in price between one dozen eggs in January and one dozen to-day. That is to say, forty cents. For forty cents you bring an action—or allow your clients to bring and defend one—pile up costs, and take up the time of this court. Is that your conception of your professional duty, gentlemen? If so, it is not mine.

"From time to time I have warned the profession against bringing frivolous matters before me. I do so once more; and I say that in all my experience I have never come across an action which so clearly shows the pigheaded obstinacy of clients, and utter misconception of duty on the part of attorneys. But that I am bound to hear and determine what is brought before me, I should dismiss the case. As I cannot do so, let us get ahead with it, in Heaven's name. A dozen eggs is borrowed when the market price is sixty cents, and returned when it is twenty. Is there any law on this obscure point?"

"Not that we have been able to find," replied Dolan. "The case seems to be absolutely *sui generis*."

"I am happy to say I agree with you there," said the judge, in biting tones.

Maloney, who had been listening with all his ears, and understanding very little, suddenly nudged his wife.

"His honor's wid us," he announced.

"How d'ye know that?" she asked.

"Ye should kape yer ears open," said Michael loftily. "The judge agrees wid Misther Dolan that it was ginerous iv us to lend the eggs, they bein' the price they was. Faix, that'll hould thim Cassidys for a while."

Judge Beekman suddenly abandoned sarcasm, and got down to tacks. "Well, Mr. Dolan, why isn't it a good payment? You lent a dozen eggs—you didn't sell them. You got a dozen back. It is true that you smashed them in an unwarranted assault, but that's your own fault. What more do you want?"

"But, y'r honor," said Dolan, "in the meantime, egg values have shrunk. One dozen does not restore us to our original position. The tender is in depreciated currency."

"Three to one, I suppose," said Beekman, whose temper, as was usual after he had said a number of unpleasant things, was much improved. "Well, Mr. McKenna?"

"We take the position that a dozen is always a dozen, both arithmetically and legally," said McKenna. "We borrowed a specific article, and we replaced it by a like article."

"No. You replaced it by a cheaper one," Dolan contradicted.

"By one *bought* cheaper," amended McKenna, beginning to get interested. "Me learned friend should not state what is not the fact."

Beekman grinned sardonically. "I understood, gentlemen, that this was the one case in which the facts were clear and undisputed."

"I do not dispute facts, y'r honor," said McKenna warmly. "But I do dispute statements which are not facts."

Suddenly, a brilliant idea occurred to Dolan. It was so simple that he wondered he had not thought of it before.

"We contend, also," he said, "that the eggs were lent on the express promise that they were to be returned in a few days. We would not have lent them for one month, or two. This promise operated on me client's mind, and directly induced her to lend the eggs. Therefore, a failure to keep that promise entitles us to the value of the eggs."

"That's a new view of it," said Judge Beekman.

"An entirely mistaken one, y'r honor," said McKenna, with vigor. "We do not admit the operation of any promise on the defendant's wife's mind. We do not admit that she has a mind. We do not admit any promise, at all."

"Unfortunately for your contention, you have already admitted it," said the judge.

McKenna knew that he had, and swore at himself for overlooking the point.

"A mere casual word in a conversation is not a promise," he argued. "It is not shown that it was relied on."

"Well, we will show it," said Dolan. "I will call Mrs. Maloney."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," snapped Judge Beekman. "You are both bound by your original statement to me. I won't listen to a rambling line of evidence. Mr. Dolan, your argument might be good, if I cared to decide the point—which I do not. Following the precedent set by Solomon, I am going to settle the case in my own way. Are your clients here? They are. Very well. Let them step forward."

Very nervously, urged by their attorneys, the Cassidys and Maloneys arose and shuffled forward before the judge.

"Cassidy," said Judge Beekman, "shake hands with Maloney. Mrs. Cassidy, shake hands with Mrs. Maloney."

They did so.

"Now you are friends again—friends, do you understand me?"

"Yis, sor!" came from the quartette, in subdued tones.

"And you will continue to be friends. No more fighting, mind. Maloney, you will pay Cassidy for his wife's dress; Cassidy, you will pay Maloney sixty cents for his eggs. You are a pair of obstinate, pig-headed idiots, only fit for an asylum. Aren't you?"

"Yis, sor!" murmured both men, in humble duet.

"Since you admit it, there is hope for you," said the judge grimly. "Remember it. Go home, and don't let me see you in my court again without good cause. Call the next case on the list!"

The crestfallen but relieved litigants filed out together. In the hall, Cassidy put on his hat, removed it again, and scratched a puzzled head.

"Which iv us was in the right iv ut about thim eggs, Maloney?" he asked.

"I dunno," answered Michael. "Did ye understand what they wor sayin'?"

"I did not," Cassidy admitted. "Did ye?"

"Divil a bit," said Michael. "But it was th' foine thrial."

"It was that," Cassidy agreed.

Before them, their wives sailed down the corridor, arm in arm, in beatific amity.

"Look at thim!" said Cassidy. "An' an hour gone they'd have fought to a finish. All this was their doin's, Mike."

"It always is," said Maloney philosophically. "What can ye expect from women? Be nature they are inconsequint an' inconstant. It's a foight wan minit, an' a kiss the next. Thank Hivin, men is more consistent, an' more stabler in their loikes an' disloikes. Could ye absorb a boot leg iv suds wid me, Terence?"

'TWIXT ZEAL AND CAUTION

A SLATER who was engaged upon the roof of a house in Glasgow, Scotland, fell from the ladder and lay in an unconscious state upon the sidewalk.

One of the pedestrians in the street who rushed to the aid of the poor man chanced to have a flask of spirits in his pocket, and, to revive him, began to pour a little down his throat.

"Canny, mon, canny," said a man looking on, "or you'll choke him."

The "unconscious" slater slowly opened his eyes, and said quietly:

"Pour awa', mon, pour awa'; ye're doin' fine."

The Fugitive Freshman

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke Oar," "The Head Coach," Etc.

For more than a year Ralph D. Paine has contributed a story of college doings to every number of the "Popular," yet he has not begun to exhaust the subject, if his popularity with readers be any indication. When Mr. Paine came to time with "The Stroke Oar," we thought that he had done his best piece of work in the field of university activities; but we were pleasantly disappointed on receipt of his later novel, "The Head Coach," published in the first November number. Once more we have had to admit that we were wrong in estimating the latter work as his high-water mark. In our opinion, "The Fugitive Freshman" surpasses the others in originality and skillful handling; and we think that every reader will agree with us.

THOMAS WHITTAKER MESERVE, JR., had been at length overtaken by a fit of the blackest melancholy. It was more serious and painful than the common variety of undergraduate "grouch," and, although this rattle-headed Yale freshman deserved no end of scolding, and it was a pity that he had grown too tall to be thoroughly spanked, yet his abysmal dejection might have moved a sympathetic observer to pity. To paint him at his worst and have done with it, let it be here confessed that he was in his second freshman year—a class heirloom, so to speak, who had come a cropper at the barrier of final examinations and was left behind by his friends who had entered college with him. This most unpleasant fact, that he had "flunked" without extenuating circumstances, was received by his father with considerable display of temper and a series of ultimatums which the hapless youth shuddered to recall. Young Thomas had been permitted to return to college for another start only after such promises of shining behavior as, in truth, could be expected of an archangel, a valedictorian, and a George Washington rolled into one.

The classmates from whom Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr., was thus compelled to separate himself by faculty decree, sincerely mourned his loss, and the succeeding mob of freshmen among whom he was enrolled welcomed him joyfully. His perennial popularity in the undergraduate world atoned for the clouded reception at home, for he accepted it as one of the soundest of axioms that "a man finds his level on the campus, which takes him for what he is worth."

He was a youth of the most excellent intentions from which the fuses must have been withdrawn, for they missed fire on all occasions; and, as for good resolutions, he made them aplenty, and probably used them less than any other student of the college.

If his scholarship was indifferent, his financial helplessness was positively appalling. At the end of his first fresh-

man year, his debts had been paid by the disgruntled parent aforesaid, who became purple of countenance as he commanded his heir, in a farewell edict which suggested a bombshell, to live within his allowance, or without it, an epigram worthy of a more appreciative audience.

Now, it happened that Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Sr., was a fine specimen of "the old-fashioned American merchant," who had grown rich by hard work, canny investments, and a frugal habit of expenditure. In the eyes of the godless generation of today, he was "a tight-wad," an epithet inelegant but vastly expressive.

When his boy was sent to college, he expected him to regard his education as an investment to reap dividends, with due regard to operating expenses; and young Thomas found himself in the position of a rich man's son with a poor man's income. Unfortunately, he did not in the least resemble his father, but seemed to hark back to an earlier generation of Meserves of a headlong and spendthrift temperament.

Lovable, generous, continually in hot water, in the slang of the campus he was "plain footless;" and the odds against his lasting long enough to win a diploma were almost prohibitive. He played baseball well, pitched for both his freshman teams, sang a rattling good song, when not in training showed a truly heroic ability to go without sleep and turn up at chapel fresh and fit, and handled a billiard cue with the skill of a wizard.

This afflicted youth sat at a disorderly desk by a dormitory window that overlooked the populous, busy campus. The season of the year was just betwixt springtime and summer. The long vacation was not far off, and the air was sweet and bright and warm, inviting youths from stuffy, stupid classrooms to loaf and gossip in the shade. The seniors were playing "nigger baby" near their segment of the fence, as was the hoary custom, and their joyous clamor was varied by an occasional wail of anguish as the stinging missile of a ball bombarded in a tender-spot some victim of the hazards of the game. From open windows, here and there, cheery young men shouted at each other like so many chanticleers crowing in a poultry yard.

This pleasant, animated scene had no charm for the gloomy soul of Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr. In the course of a woe-begone soliloquy, he said to himself:

"I don't see how in the world I got in the hole again. It must have been fine growing weather for debts this year, and I have a lusty second crop and no mistake. Why do the robbers give me credit? It is a conspiracy to ruin me. I don't dare to put my troubles on paper and snatch a bird's-eye view of the horrible total. But I suppose I really ought to."

Thereupon, with a whimsical recollection of the procedure of Robinson Crusoe when in a dire plight, he set about jotting down a schedule of his misfortunes:

Mighty slim chance of passing final exams and making the sophomore class next year. Stand in mathematics and Latin has been simply rotten.

Marks for cutting recitations and going out of town are so near the limit that I'm lucky if I fight off being suspended between now and summer.

The dean is sore on me about that class supper. I didn't paint old Silliman's statue Yale blue, but he blames me for every fool ruction that breaks loose in the freshman ranks.

Thomas paused, glowered at his inky fingers, rubbed his head, and turned to face the door, for his roommate, Joe Craig, had entered and was regarding him with a mirthful smile.

"Why so sad and mussed up? Nobody expects our little Tommy Bright-Eyes to be caught in the act of nursing a grouch," was the greeting.

"Don't josh me, Joe," wailed the other. "I am full of real troubles. This taking account of stock is no merry jest. Robinson Crusoe chalked down his calamities, and then footed up what he had to be thankful for, and struck a balance that was all to the good. But I am shy any cheering features. It is all one-sided. Nothing but desolation

and tragedy. The game is so complicated that I'm afraid I can't beat it."

"What have you been doing to that smudgy piece of paper? Let me see it," demanded Craig, who was a solid, matter-of-fact person for his years. "Um-m! You knew all this without writing it out. Now, how about the money you owe? Aren't you going to complete this touching specimen of English prose composition?"

"I suppose I might as well, Joe, when I get through, there will be nothing left to do but apply for a receiver. It scares me to think of looking the darn fool figures in the face. Well, here goes. I owe Abe Hamburger four hundred—the greasy little scoundrel! Right there is enough to give me nervous prostration. He has my notes, of course. Lost it betting on the football games, last fall. College spirit comes high, but I hate to be a paper sport."

"And it is costing you ten per cent. a month in interest, you tow-headed fool," chided Craig in most unsympathetic accents. "Abe gave you the cash because he knows your father has oodles of coin and will have to settle if you don't, because you are a minor. Forty dollars a month interest you are dropping into a rat hole. All right. What next?"

"That dinner I gave at Heub's on my birthday. Eighty-seven dollars is what the bill looks like. Gee whillikins, though, we had a good time, didn't we?"

"And this is a case of oh, what a difference in the morning, Thomas Whittaker, Jr. Have you any more exhibits as bad as these?"

"Benson, the Chapel Street tailor, claims I owe him for two hundred and forty dollars' worth of clothes. I guess he is right."

"What did you do with them?" coldly demanded the roommate. "Did you eat 'em?"

"No, I sold them to Mose Einstein, second-handed, to raise cash for the bare necessities of life, Joe. Then, of course, I had to order more clothes from the piratical Benson. They get you going and coming. There is no escape."

"Go ahead. Let's hear the worst." Craig was keeping track of the items with his own pencil and scrap of paper, while Thomas wrestled with the pen at his desk, and breathed hard as he made the entries beneath the memoranda that dealt with his precarious relations with the faculty.

"Oh, I am a month behind with my bills at the eating club, and I have signed a good many checks for feed and drinks at Gus Martin's place, and there is a furniture man who displays a peevish temper, and——"

"Put 'em all down; names and exact amounts," said Craig. "That receivership is the only sane idea you have coughed up in a long time, Thomas. If you like, I'll act as your receiver till further notice. We don't want to lose you, and if your father got onto this infernal mess I suppose he would be some hot under the collar."

"Hot? He'd blow up with a report that would shake the county," snorted Tom. "He ought to have sent a business manager to college with me. No joking, Joe, this is my last chance. If I don't get matters straightened out somehow, he will yank me from college by the back of the neck, and put me to work in his horseshoe-nail factory. Any fate but that. By Jove I'm not sure that he would do that much for me. I have sorely tried his temper, and he is strictly orthodox when it comes to the spoiled child. Honestly, he has me scared, this time."

Craig frowned, and studied the harrowing total of entanglements. His task would be a heavy one, but he was hopeful by nature, and he had a genuine fondness for his genial, helpless loafer of a comrade. The notion of a receivership tickled his fancy, and he proceeded to outline the conditions thereof.

"You must turn over your allowance check to me, Tom, and I will handle it absolutely. One dollar a week spending money is your limit. If you borrow one cent of anybody I'll beat you half to death, and I am man

enough to do it. And you must shake your eating club, and come around to my joint, and save four dollars a week there. As for your debts, I'll spread the surplus around and keep your creditors appeased. With Abe Hamburger I'll make some kind of a compromise, bluff him into cutting down his interest, and give him a hundred at a time. Confound you, you are going to lead the simple life. And you are going to pass your exams. I'll sit up nights to tutor you. Now, brace up, and come along to the field for baseball practice."

Thomas Meserve was elated. He had been delivered from all his snares and pitfalls. His confidence in sturdy Joe Craig was implicit. Arm in arm, they walked across the campus, the culprit loud in protestations of gratitude, and eloquent with promises of reform. While they waited for a street car to the Yale field, Thomas started with an air of dismay, and blurted:

"I left that written list of my troubles right on top of the desk in full sight of anybody that happens to blow into the rooms, Joe. It was a silly kind of performance, and I didn't mean it for public circulation. Whew! 'Snoopy' Morgan, the tutor in our entry, might drift in there looking for me. He is about due to read the riot act. Wait here, and I'll run back and tuck the paper out of sight."

Meserve trotted toward the nearest gateway, scampered up the stairs of Lawrance Hall, bolted into the sitting room, and pounced on the damnatory document. After trying to jerk open two drawers, which stuck fast, as was their habit, he hastily thrust the slip of paper between the leaves of a bulky volume reposing upon the top shelf of the bookcase, as the handiest refuge that caught his roving eye. Instantly thereafter, he departed in great haste, and rejoined Craig, who was missing street cars with his accustomed tranquility.

His mind relieved of its burdens, Thomas was in fine fettle for baseball; and, as matters turned out, he pitched with such skill and energy that the freshman captain praised his work and asked the varsity coach to watch the last two innings of the game.

It was a happy, carefree freshman that returned to the campus in the late afternoon. He intended to study hard, to leave his financial problems wholly in the hands of his loyal roommate, and, as he said joyously to himself, to "waltz into the sophomore class with spangles on."

In this enviable mood, he hurried to his room well ahead of Craig, to clear up his desk, put his text-books in order, and make ready to spend the evening in hard study. While rummaging to and fro, he happened to think of a minor item or two which he had failed to add to the list of his debts. It would never do to muddle things with the receiver. A complete inventory was part of the contract. Thomas whirled around to lay hands on the book in which he had hidden the document.

There was no bulky volume upon the top shelf of the bookcase. Somewhat excited and puzzled, he began an erratic search, tossing books this way and that, looking behind the shelves, pitching divan pillows to the floor, peering under the furniture. Then, feeling uncertain of the identity of the book he wanted, for he had not paused to read its title, he began to shake one portly volume after another, but no smudgy slip of paper fluttered from between the leaves. Perhaps some fellow had run in and borrowed it.

Dashing into the entry, Thomas Meserve hailed the three other freshmen who lived in this dormitory, but they pleaded not guilty, and he returned to his rooms in considerable agitation. The scheme of committing one's intimate and personal troubles to paper might answer very well for Robinson Crusoe, who dwelt on a desert island—besides which, his man Friday could not read—but it was a risky performance for a college campus, and Thomas Meserve was not at all anxious to have this disgraceful summary of his record fall into strange hands.

He was still engaging in turning the

room upside down in an aimless, hurricane style of search, when a round-faced, elderly negro timidly ventured as far as the doorway, stood appalled at the scene of dire confusion, and ventured to observe with apologetic manner:

"Never mind, Mistah Meserve. I'll come back when you'se done through havin' fits. 'Scuse me, but I jes' wanted to 'splain 'bout doin' an errand for you this afternoon when you was done gone to th' fiel'. My! but this yere room looks as if you was feelin' powerful rankabumptious. Reckon I'll have a mawnin's work pickin' it up."

Thomas halted in his career, and asked with much vehemence:

"Were you in here this afternoon, January Ferguson? And what the dickens was the errand you did for me?"

Mr. Ferguson ambled into the room, twiddled his hat in his hands, and meekly began to explain:

"It was 'bout them books you tol' me the other day to——"

"Books! What books? Jumping Jimminy! You didn't send them——"

"You lit on me las' week for disrememberin' to pack 'em in a box and ship 'em by express, Mistah Meserve," January Ferguson broke in to say with a good deal of dignity. "They was a birthday present, you 'splained, so I wropped up the two of 'em mos' particular, an' give 'em to the express man when he druv on the campus at four o'clock."

The pink-and-white complexion of Thomas Meserve had blanched to a sickly pallor. Backing into the divan, he sat down, plump, as if his knees had been suddenly shorn of their strength. His mouth was open while he stared now at the bookcase, again at January Ferguson, and strove in vain to find words to fit the hideous situation. At length, he managed to gasp in tremulous, broken accents:

"W-was one of the two b-books on the top shelf yonder?"

"Yessir, right on top; an' t'other was on th' next shelf below where I done put 'em when I dusted th' room yestiddy! What all I done wrong, heh? Why is you so dumfoozled, Mistah Meserve? You cussed me out somethin' scand'lous a while ago 'cause I done forgot to sen' them books. I'se got a reputation as th' mos' reliable, 'sponsible sweep on th' Yale campus. You ain't findin' fault, is you?"

The voice of Thomas Meserve was crushed and weary, his gestures mechanical, as if life had lost all its zest, when he feebly rejoined:

"No, January, it is all my fault. I did tell you to put those two big, expensive books in a box and ship them to Cleveland. They cost me ten dollars, and they were a birthday present for my father, intended to show him that I had solid tastes in reading. I—I never dreamed that you would get so dreadfully busy this afternoon. In fact, the matter never entered my head when I—I——" Thomas gulped, as if facing the hangman's noose, beat his poor, distracted head with his two fists, and pensively regarded the amazed countenance of January Ferguson.

"Ain't you paid for them books? Is th' store man tryin' to git 'em back, an' making trouble for you?" queried the tender-hearted sweep. "Bless your soul, I'se got ten dollahs that you kin have long as you want it. I reckon your old man gwine be powerful pleased wid them hefty books an' what he finds inside 'em."

"Yes, January, that's it. What he finds inside 'em is the important feature. Juicy reading, all right." A wan smile flickered across the freshman's despairing features, for, although hope was dead, his sense of humor could not be wholly submerged. "'Obey orders if you break owners,' was your motto this afternoon. And this has busted me."

"Mebbe I better come round when you don't feel so flighty," suggested the sweep. "I'se thankful you don't bear me no hard feelin's; but I'se sure sorry for your distress. 'Pears to me you has a mos' mysterious an' aggravatin' 'fliction, suh. I seen my duty, an' I done been gone an' done it."

"Good night, January, you have done

me up brown," murmured Thomas, and the sweep stole forth with a solemn air, as if he had been attending a deathbed.

Left to himself, the freshman walked the floor with hasty, fevered stride. Somewhere, in one of the two volumes of "The World's Greatest Orators," was ambushed that dreadful confession of his college deeds in tabloid form, as it were; his sad record for scholarship and discipline, and the black enumeration of his sinful debts, his dealings with a usurer, his convivial obligations to roistering cafés, his dubious transactions with the tailor. And, as fast as trains could carry it, this death warrant must be speeding toward his father.

Thomas was too distraught to form any coherent plan of action. He was still striding the floor and talking to himself, when Joe Craig popped in; and, at sight of his evident anguish, lustily demanded:

"What now, Tom? Why, you are worse than ever. I thought I had you all straightened out and keeping on the sunny side of the street. Come, come, confess it all to your receiver."

The confession was brief, but pregnant with significance, and even the steady-going Craig was daunted as he whistled and cried:

"As a footless performance, this breaks all your records. And that is saying a lot. Tucked the Robinson Crusoe paper away in a book, and then shipped it home to your dad! Receiver be hanged! What you need is a strong-armed keeper, two of 'em to stand watch night and day. Didn't you look at the book? Didn't you remember that you had told January to pack it up?"

"I was in an awful hurry, and I guess I was thinking of something else, Joe," stammered Meserve. "I felt so good over our scheme to fix up all my troubles that I had a kind of dry jag, and—no, I don't recall looking at the book at all. But what's the sense in scolding me, now? I'll get all the punishment that is coming to me."

"Oh, pooh, Tom; don't be a quitter! We won't give up without making some kind of a bluff. Have you telephoned the express office to find out whether the package has been forwarded? Perhaps we can head it off at this end."

"Great head, Joe," and Meserve brightened and madly dived after his hat. "Let's dash over to the drug store and call them up. It is a fighting chance. I was so flabbergasted that I never thought of doing anything at all. I feel kind of hollow and wobbly."

Alas! to the earnest question asked over the telephone, the answer came back that the box addressed to "Thomas W. Meserve, Sr., Cleveland, Ohio," had been promptly dispatched on the five-o'clock express to New York. If the clerk at the other end of the wire expected to be praised for this speedy transaction he was disappointed, for the telephone bore to his ear a hollow groan and what sounded suspiciously like a profane malediction on his head and the corporation for which he toiled. Out of the drug store tottered Thomas W. Meserve, Jr., and crossed Chapel Street as far as the steps of Osborne Hall, where he sat himself down, and the faithful Craig did likewise.

"Is it really as bad as all this, Tom?" asked the devoted roommate. "How about telegraphing your mother, and asking her to swipe the books before the old gentleman gets next to them? A fellow's mother will generally help him out of a tight corner, don't you know."

"She is out in Denver visiting a bunch of relatives. And if she was at home, I don't believe she would dare to intercede for me very hard. Last year, when I was dropped from my class, father was for putting me at work to do stunts with horseshoe nails right then, but she begged hard and balked him of his prey. Honestly, I didn't mean to be so footless this year. I guess I am built that way."

Craig was not to be beaten without another effort, and, after some cogitation, he ventured to suggest:

"Can't you bribe a servant by wire?"

"Not on your life. They are all afraid of the boss; and, ten to one, the message wouldn't get by him. I am up against it, Joe, and here is where I bid old Yale farewell."

"Oh, pooh; we'll cook up a telegram to send to your father himself. Make it read something like this: 'Sent wrong birthday present by mistake. Please return express package unopened.'"

"You are not onto his curves," sighed the Meserve heir. "That message would make him open the books just to see what fool performance I had been guilty of this time. And when he does unearth those damn 'Famous Orators' he will begin at the preface and read every page to the end of volume two without skipping a line. He is a thorough and painstaking reader, if ever there was one. Oh, dear, I don't know which volume contains my charge of dynamite. It may be a week before he plows his way as far as that. And I can't stand the suspense, Joe. You had better pick out a death watch from among the fellows in our entry."

"My goodness, but this is a dramatic situation," cried Craig, in whose voice there was a shade of gloating satisfaction which excessively annoyed his dolorous companion. Craig had literary aspirations, and was writing for the college magazines. "Here you are, in the hands of the blind fates, and a thousand miles or so away your doom is drawing nearer a page at a time. Every time your father begins to read another of the world's most famous orations, he will be just that much closer to the tragic revelation. What a plot for a short story!"

"It is more like a plot for the undertaker," grumbled Thomas. "The horseshoe-nail factory is bad medicine, and I hate to think of it. But that isn't the worst, by a long shot. I'll be soured on at home, and held up as a horrible example and an awful warning, and treated like a bad little boy. Father isn't so blamed old in years, but he couldn't have been really young at any stage of the game, and it is me for the outer darkness and the boycott. I suppose I deserve it, but it's hard luck, all the same. I was going to brace up and live down my sad past. No, I'm not going home. I'll try to get a job somewhere else and be my own boss."

"Don't throw up your hands, yet," counseled Craig. "He may be too busy to read just now. Perhaps the horseshoe-nail market is on the boom. You'll be going home for the summer before long. It may not be too late, then."

"I'd play sick and go out to Cleveland to-night on the chance of beating those famous orators in a breakneck finish," was the reply. "But I'd be sure to flunk my exams if I leave college now; and then I should be in just as deep a hole. Speaking of horseshoe nails, this is a nightmare, and no mistake. I can't sleep to-night, Joe. This is where I get put to the torture."

"I am willing to go to Cleveland and beard the lion in his den," stoutly quoth Craig, as he laid his hand upon the clammy fingers of his friend. "But the deuce of it is that all I can deliver is a lot of your promises to be good, and he has heard those before. And really there is no explaining the documents in the case. You didn't overlook a solitary bet when it came to teetotally queering yourself with him. However, you're not dead yet. Let's go play some billiards and eat supper downtown. You won't want to meet the crowd to-night."

Given more years and a wider experience of life, this brace of freshmen might have viewed the situation as not utterly hopeless. If youth, however, has its joys, it has also its penalties. And one of the latter is the lack of perspective, so that events wear an air of tragic finality far beyond their real and ultimate importance in the scheme of things. Having convinced himself that his college career was blighted, his father's wrath imminent and blasting, and his only refuge in flight, Thomas Meserve already looked upon himself as a Yale outcast and a football of fortune. He would not return to Cleveland, no—his mind was made up. His father had always misunderstood him. Of course, he meant

to write to his mother, but if she secretly sent him money he must return it, kindly but firmly. After he had found a "job" and established himself, he would go home for a visit.

His lofty introspection sufficed to maintain a stern and courageous attitude for a little time, but, next day, the freshman found his nerves in shaky condition. The suspense of this waiting for the blow to fall was very racking, and the victim began to feel panicky and was easily startled. On the baseball field he was so erratic and unsatisfactory that the freshman captain suspected he had broken training and told him to "lay off for two or three days and get in shape." This was a kind of last straw, and Thomas sulked in his rooms; nor could Joe Craig batter him into a more stalwart mood.

Almost a week passed, and Meserve had ceased to study for the day's recitations, "flunking" in one course after another with an air of careless indifference. There was no more fight left in him. His roommate exhorted him to brace himself and "try to bluff the old man," but Thomas would have jumped through the window if any one said "Boo!" to him.

At length—and it seemed ages and ages since the fateful day on which January Ferguson had sent the "Famous Orators" along their devastating way—a messenger boy presented at the door of the freshman's rooms a yellow envelope which Thomas ripped open with unsteady fingers. He had expected the worst, and here it was:

Will arrive New Haven ten Friday morning. Let nothing interfere with your meeting me. T. W. MESERVE.

Thomas gave the telegram to Joe Craig, and faltered:

"Right in the neck, where I expected it. Didn't I tell you that he was an earnest and sincere reader? The death warrant must have been in the second volume. Well, I am glad—honestly, I am—to feel that the blow has fallen. It is all over with me, Joe. He didn't even send for me. Did you notice that? He is coming on to yank me home with him, after settling my bills for the honor of the family."

"It certainly looks like it, Tom. He is headed this way with all sail set. You bet I'll say a good word for you if I can make him listen, and so will a hundred more freshmen."

Tom Meserve stood in the centre of the room, chin up, chest out, fists clinched, a fine figure of defiance, as if he had resolved to die at his post. The pose was only assumed, however, and presently he said in a die-away voice which sounded not in the least heroic:

"You don't know him, Joe. After he has chatted with the faculty and a few of my creditors, he will be too mad to listen to what a million freshmen might have to say. This is the last nail in my coffin—I mean his coming on to New Haven. Oh, January Ferguson, you meant well; but you surely did stack up trouble for me."

"You are not going to lose your nerve entirely, are you?" asked Craig, at a loss how to help.

Tom caught up his hat, jammed it fiercely over his eyes, and declaimed:

"I don't propose to stay here and let him take me captive, if that is what you mean. I am going to pack my trunk to-day. Father is due here to-morrow morning, and that gives me less than twenty-four hours' start. You—you can have my share of the furniture and pictures, Joe, and the rugs. C-confound it, I believe I am getting weepy!"

Craig threw his arm across the shoulders of his forlorn comrade, and cried with emotion:

"Don't be a fool, Tom. Don't give up yet, old man. You are clean crazy to go charging off this way. Why, your mother will never get over it. Where on earth can you find a job, anyhow?"

"I—I don't intend to go any farther than New York," quavered the fugitive freshman. "And I can send word to mother that I am all right without giving my address. As for f-father, he has brought it all on himself. H-he ought to have known better. If he

had given me a d-decent allowance, I could have kept out of debt."

"You have had enough money—as much as I have to spend," was Craig's sober comment, "but you wanted to travel with the high-rollers of the class. I am not going to hit you when you are down, Tom; but maybe this is the kind of a jolt you need. Only don't be a quitter; don't make a bigger ass of yourself by running away. Stay here and face the music, like a little man. You pater's bark may be worse than his bite."

"Oh, shucks! I have had my chance, and I have made a mess of every blessed thing," sighed the other. "Let's quit chewing it over for to-night. My head feels as if the lid was about to blow off."

"All right, Tommy, old man. I am awfully sorry I can't be here to-morrow morning. The freshman nine goes to Lawrenceville to play, and we have to take an early train. But don't fly the coop until I get back to-morrow night. Promise me that."

Meserve shook his head with an undecided air, said nothing, and moved toward the campus gateway. Craig had to leave him because of an appointment with the athletic subscription committee, and the forlorn freshman wandered aimlessly through the quadrangle, having forgotten the minor detail of supper. Presently, the dusky campus began to seethe and hum, and hundreds of clamorous young men flocked toward the fence. It was a spontaneous eruption which soon attracted the dormitory population from every quarter. After a fusillade of cheers, a great chorus of strong voices burst into the swinging refrain of

Chi Rho, Omega Lambda Chi!
We meet to-night to celebrate
The Omega Lambda Chi.

As if a signal had been given, the crowd surged forward, arranged itself into ranks linked together arm in arm, and began to dance in a weaving, skipping maze, circling one elm tree after another, while over and over a thousand young men chanted the fragmentary song of the Omega Lambda Chi.

The origin of this rite was obscure. It was a campus tradition handed down from some fraternity long since vanished. But as soon as ever the springtime was drifting into summer there happened this curious ceremonial of "Omega Lambda Chi night." The words ran to a heady, intoxicating sort of tune, which was tirelessly reiterated while the celebrants rollicked across the campus and into Chapel Street, still singing to every elm in its turn, like a Bacchic chorus come to life after two thousand years of silence.

Tom Meserve stood in the shadows and watched the dancing multitude go streaming past the Old Brick Row, nor did he move away until from afar he heard the rolling, cadenced chant sound fainter and fainter:

We meet to-night to celebrate
The Omega Lambda Chi.

As he trudged heavily toward his rooms, remorse and regret were tormenting him. He had been one of these men of Yale, privileged to share their wholesome, buoyant life, and he had flung it all away. The black dog was upon his back, and for the first time he was learning what it meant to suffer. Going into his bedroom, he locked the door, unwilling to face his roommate. When Craig came in, he raised a shout of greeting, but there was no response. At last, there came a muffled response from beyond the barrier:

"Good night, Joe. I have gone to bed."

Craig dropped into a chair, rubbed his honest head, scowled at the locked door, and said to himself:

"Poor old Tommy! I wish I were older and had more sense. I don't know what to do for him. I suppose he will be starved out in no time when he gets into the big city, if he really does bolt, and then he will have to go home and eat more humble pie than fatted calf. I don't see any other way out of it. He is the most footless ever, but I am surely fond of Tommy."

Next morning, Joe Craig overslept, and was compelled to make a cyclonic

departure to meet the freshman nine at the railroad station. He aroused Thomas, who unbarred the door, sleepily mumbled farewell, and wished the team good luck, beyond which there was no time for talk. Craig fled in haste, feeling guilty that he had not delivered himself of sundry, helpful exhortations. He had vital concerns of his own to think of, however, and it was unfair to expect him to forget for a moment the fact that he was journeying afar to play ball for the honor of the great and glorious freshman class.

As the Lawrenceville game turned out, Craig made two hits, played brilliantly in left field, and, in brief, turned the tide of victory so strongly for his own nine that he was acclaimed the hero of the contest. During the homeward journey, the game had to be threshed over by innings, and Craig had no time to brood over his roommate's misfortunes until the train drew near New Haven late in the evening.

It was with much anxiety and foreboding that he forsook the other players at a corner of the campus and hastened to his dormitory. The sitting room was empty, there was no Tom Meserve in his bedroom, and on every hand were signs of a rapid and disorderly exodus. Craig scanned the desk of the fugitive for some farewell message, and discovered the following note, scribbled with a trembling and uncertain pencil:

DEAR TOM: I am giving this to January Ferguson with orders to hold it until after my father has left the rooms for the day, and then put it where you will be sure to find it. I don't want father to read it. I suppose he will hang around New Haven to have a talk with you. You don't have to meet him, if you see him first. I felt as if I wanted to have it out with him, really I did, but I lost my nerve again while I was sitting here waiting. It was something awful. You don't know how rocky I feel, Joe. It is nine o'clock now, and I have decided to light out on the next train to New York, which will just miss him. I have swiped a couple of your clean shirts, and will send them back sure. Mose Einstein happened to drop in early, and I sold him some more clothes, and I can hock my watch and some other stuff on the way to the station, so I am all right for cash. If you see my father, give him the best game of jolly you can, won't you? You needn't lie about my college record, but maybe you can pick out one or two good spots in it. I suppose I am a coward and a yellow pup, but I just won't go home. Fellows younger than I am are making their own living. I will write when I find a job. Give my love to the crowd. I owe Jimmy Jenkins ten dollars. You can sell my Morris chair and pay him. I hope you can find a better roommate, Joe.

Yours for keeps,
TOM.

II.

A very young man of gentlemanly appearance emerged from a shabby hotel in a side street leading from Union Square, and looked askance at the crowd which eddied along the pavement. He was one of an innumerable company of atoms that ran to and fro over the face of the metropolis, and a week of searching to find a place among them had seared the soul of Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Jr. His courage and his funds were ebbing fast. Worse than this, he had caught a glimpse of his father on the day before, and was convinced that the paternal pertinacity which had wrested a fortune from horseshoe nails would be slow to abandon the trail.

Perhaps the secret that he intended to flee to New York had been cunningly extracted from Joe Craig, who was a poor hand at subterfuge, thought the fugitive. At any rate, the sight of T. W. Meserve, Sr., as discerned afar off, plunged his son into a state of acute panic so that he was afraid to traverse the main thoroughfares, and skulked downtown and back again by the most devious and disreputable routes.

Yale freshmen were in no demand—New York seemed satisfied to do without them. Thomas refused to acknowledge this depressing fact as long as possible. He steered clear of his father's business friends, and sought a foothold on his own merits, chasing "Want Ads" with the most commendable agility, pestering city editors who ought to need a bright cub reporter, and haunting the corridors of uptown hotels on the chance of finding a lad to tutor or of "hearing something to his advantage." Come to think it over,

he had never seriously investigated the labor market as affected by the law of supply and demand. All successful men must have made a start somewhere and somehow, but if they began at the bottom of the ladder they must have selfishly pulled the ladder up after them.

"Footless" as he was, there was a streak of stubbornness in the luckless Thomas, and he could not picture himself as going home or retreating to New Haven to find a temporary refuge with Joe Craig and his other chums among the freshmen.

Hitherto New York had been a kind of enchanted land, to be visited when one had money to throw away; a glittering, alluring paradise for undergraduates to make merry in. Now it had become an unfriendly, chaotic inferno, lonely beyond words, in which struggling mankind had no time for a courteous greeting or a heartening word. On the campus, Tom Meserve had been a personage. Here, he was a cursed nuisance. He had fled as little boys "run away," without any definite purpose, with the foggiest notions of what might lay before him.

Alas! there was no amiable Abe Hamburger to swap cash for promissory notes at ten per cent. a month, and Thomas had rid himself of all the clothing he could do without ere he took to his heels. It seemed absolutely incredible that he should be adrift without a cent in the world, but the bitter reality was not to be denied. His father preferred to find quarters in the old Astor House whenever business called him to New York—of this Thomas was well aware; but he flinched and balked at the idea of going to this ignominious harbor, and begging for forgiveness and a square meal in the same breath. An absurd, yet pitiful, figure was this sprightly, ingenuous lad, no more fitted for a flight into the big and bustling world than a fledgling sparrow.

Thomas had turned his very last dollar into small change, a harrowing event in itself, when he made the acquaintance of the first man to show the slightest degree of human interest in his welfare among all the myriad dwellers in Manhattan.

The derelict freshman was headed downtown, after making a hesitant, reluctant plunge into the hostile current of the streets, bent on interviewing a gentleman who had advertised in the *Herald* for a "private secretary. Must be a collegian."

Aiming to steer clear of Broadway, he veered into Sixth Avenue, and walked for some distance, debating whether to squander car fare in this critical status of his finances—a sane impulse which would have delighted his "receiver," Joe Craig.

He was passing a corner saloon in a neighborhood which showed signs of wear and tear, when there arose a sudden and prodigious outcry behind the swinging half doors. A deep voice bellowed wrath and defiance, there followed a crash as of breaking furniture, and the sound of furious scuffling. Tom ventured to peer over the blind, and then dodged aside in time to escape the impact of a burly giant of a man who cannoned out upon the pavement in front of three others who were propelling him with great violence, the foremost hammering his broad neck with a bung-starter.

"Bounced, be gob!" ejaculated the ejected one, bounding to his feet as if made of rubber. Then, spying the interested freshman, he cried vehemently: "Here, my lad. Hold my coat and hat. I was took in flank and surprised. 'Twas an ambuscade. Here goes for a charge."

With this, he began to toss apparel at Tom, who clutched and held it, staring, wild-eyed, as the undaunted stranger caught his breath with a whistling sound, turned swiftly on the enemy, shot his fist into the stomach of one who had lingered, hastened the entrance of another with a well-aimed kick, and shot into the saloon faster than he had come out. Thomas followed rather gingerly, murmuring with frank admiration:

"He is a good sport and a sandy pup, all right."

This time the battle was brief but furious. As many as five toughs and barkeepers rallied to the aid of the "bouncer," and against such odds as these single-handed valor was overmatched. Heroic was the resistance, but once more the indefatigable gladiator went flying through the door, to land upon his head with a skull-cracking thump. There was no chance to kick him while down, however, for he scrambled to his feet like a cat, wiped his bleeding nose with his fist, and then beckoned to Thomas, who had flattened himself against the wall, aghast at this furious style of hand-to-hand combat. The stranger trotted nimbly into the nearest side street, and the freshman tagged after, silently offering to restore the coat and hat.

"You are a real good lad," exclaimed the stranger, with a merry smile that was somewhat twisted because of a swelling lip. "I am ashamed to have you see me makin' a disorderly retreat, but I am not the man I was before I did two enlistments in the Philippines. The ginger was took out of me. Oh, I'm not done with 'em yet over yonder in the booze factory. Don't think I'm drunk. I never touch a drop."

Thomas had time to survey the rugged yet pleasing aspect of this singular person who proclaimed the doctrine of abstinence in such unusual circumstances. He was much older than the freshman, but still a young man on the right side of thirty. His face was brown, his gray eyes had a dancing light of virile enjoyment of life as it came to him, and his chin belonged to the fighting breed. Glancing over his shoulder, he observed that his late assailants were grouped outside the saloon, and he spoke up briskly:

"If you're not too busy, my lad, do you mind footin' it two blocks up and one over, west, and you will see Dennis O'Neill's billiard emporium? There should be four buck privates in there punchin' holes in a poor, sufferin' table with their cues. They're all in uniform. Tell 'em Jack Hogan needs 'em, and they'll come on the jump. I want to stay here and reconnoitre."

Thomas dared not refuse. Mr. Hogan had a masterly and forceful way with him. And the youngster, who had been so summarily impressed as an ally, had a natural curiosity to witness the next stage of the campaign. Therefore, he ran at full speed, went wide of a policeman who was helping himself to peanuts from a vender's barrow, and had no difficulty in finding the "billiard emporium" aforesaid. The four buck privates of Uncle Sam's infantry were harmlessly squabbling over the score, but they grounded their cues at attention while Thomas delivered his brief message.

"Has he been fighting? And does he need help?" asked one of them in matter-of-fact tones.

"Yes, and five men jumped on him, and he put up the bulliest kind of a scrap," Thomas excitedly blurted.

"He got licked, or he wouldn't be sending for us," was the comment of another soldier. "Jack must be getting soft. All right, men, I suppose we'll have to quit our game and go see what he wants."

Thomas led the way with a fluttering emotion of pride, as if he were in command of a military expedition. Behind him, keeping step two and two, tramped the heavy shoes of the calm and ready privates. Mr. Hogan, doing sentry duty in the side street, welcomed them without emotion, and explained, as they clustered about him:

"I slipped away from you, boys, to play a bit of poker, my only dissipation, as you well know. I was handed the tip that the game in the back room yonder was straight. It wasn't. I was robbed of my eighty dollars, discharge pay and travel allowance; and, when I hollered, they threw me out, twice. My eighty dollars is in the pants pocket of the boss robber, and he's still inside. I have kept my eye on both doors. Will you help me get back my eighty dollars?"

"Sure, Jack. How about the police? You've chucked the uniform, but we're still on the muster roll," spoke up the tallest of the four privates.

"The lad here will do outpost duty,

and watch for the cops. They won't bother the place unless the cutthroats are gettin' the worst of it," replied Hogan. "Come on, quick. They've all slipped inside."

Thomas was left to follow with due caution while the attacking party of five advanced at the double-quick, stormed the saloon door with a yell, and entered like a landslide. Faithful to his trust, the freshman guarded the line of retreat, although he was wild with eagerness to behold the scrimmage. From the noise, it was to be concluded that the party was working its way to the back room with systematic thoroughness. The inmates began to pour out of doors and windows, but the task was not to be as easy as it appeared. The neighborhood had begun to swarm toward the scene, and a mob was gathering as by magic. Jack Hogan and his friends must fight their way out again as it looked to the freshman, and he could not force a passage through to warn them of the peril in rear.

In a surprisingly short time the voice of Hogan was heard in a roar of triumph, and presently he fought his way to the sidewalk, dragging after him a fat, red-faced man, whom he dumped down like a sack of meal. The four privates came boiling out in close order, and, in a twinkling, the mob closed on them. Jack Hogan was tugging at the fat man in desperate haste, but his energies were sorely hampered. At last, with a mighty wrench, he fetched away one leg of his victim's trousers, waved the fragment over his head like a guidon, and shouted:

"Clear out of this, boys. It's gettin' too hot for us."

Almost submerged by the angry, clamorous mob, they cleared a path, hammer and tongs, while Tom Meserve took to his heels to save himself. Just then, a shrill cry arose behind him:

"There goes the lookout for the soldier gang. Get after him, and beat him up!"

Thomas looked behind him. He was being pursued by a score of ruffianly-looking men and boys, whose purpose was most disquieting. He knew not which way to turn for refuge. His wits were all askew. He expected to be overtaken and kicked and clubbed to a jelly. His dangerous situation had not escaped the vigilant eye of Jack Hogan, however; and this loyal comrade promptly bellowed to his followers:

"Cut loose for yourselves, boys. Hike for the Governor's Island boat. I must stick by the lad. He's the real stuff."

The frightened, panting freshman stole another glance rearward, and beheld Jack Hogan vault over the tailboard of an express wagon, snatch the reins from the driver's hands, hit him a reassuring thump on the back, and larrup the horse into a clumsy gallop. Past the pursuing crowd rattled this chariot, Hogan ducking stones, bricks, and bottles hurled at him.

A moment later, he pulled into the curb, waved an arm at Thomas, who leaped aboard in a headlong rush, and the wagon dashed onward, making a hopeless, stern chase of it. A few blocks of flight at a rapid gait, and Hogan found time to explain to the driver.

"I seemed kind of hasty, my friend; but the divils back yonder was after this lad with no cause whatever, and he needed speedy transportation. Did I take you far out of your way?"

"Not a step of it," replied the wizened old expressman. "I'm Irish meself. Glad to do ye a small favor, nor am I askin' any foolish questions. So long as ye didn't mix me in trouble with th' cops, I have no kick comin'."

"It was awfully white of you," said Thomas, whose voice was a trifle shaky. "I wish I had more," he continued, fumbling in his pockets. "Take this as a little gift, won't you?"

In this manner, vanished the last remnant of the fortune of the fugitive freshman. Not to be outdone, Jack Hogan rummaged in his clothing, and produced a five-dollar bill, which he thrust into the driver's grimy paw with a friendly grin. The old man chuckled, cocked his head to one side, and warmly vouchsafed:

"I didn't hire myself to be run away with; but if you push it at me as hard as that, I can't refuse. Right is right, and God knows the poor has no easy job livin' these days."

"Plenty more in my war bags," said Hogan, looking down at the trouser leg of the fat gambler, which was carefully gripped between his knees. "I'd better be fishin' out my eighty dollars, heh, lad?"

The discharged soldier felt in the pocket of his spoils of war, turned and twisted the prize this way and that, peered dolefully along every seam and crevice, and, at length, remarked in lugubrious tones:

"Be gob, I ripped the wrong leg off him, that's what I went and did. I must have got my compass points twisted. I'll swear I saw him tuck it in his left-hand pocket; so I dove for his left leg and fetched it away with me, as ye will have observed."

"Maybe he shifted it on you," said Thomas.

"The dirty swine! 'Twould be just like him. He stacked the cards on me, an' he was low enough to follow it with stackin' his breeches. Oh, well, I done my best. Come on, my boy. We didn't charter this wagon by the day. So-long, Mike."

The twain clambered down, the expressman waved a cordial farewell, and Hogan looked at Thomas Meserve, and the freshman stared back at the rueful soldier.

"It was my last cent on earth," said Thomas.

"Same here. The five dollars was all I saved out of the wreck of my eighty dollars," returned Hogan. "We died game, though. A pretty mess I've led you into. It's quite natural for me to be flat broke; but you look as if it pained you considerable. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! You had better run home and forget the bad company you were dragged into by the hair of your head."

Thomas Meserve smiled uncertainly and made confession, unwilling to leave this bold and ready friend, who was not afraid of going broke in New York or anywhere else.

"I live in Cleveland, but I can't go home. I have been looking for work, and can't find it. What are you going to do next? I—I, well, it's been so infernally lonesome here that I'm awfully glad you asked me to hold your coat. My! but you aren't afraid of anything, are you, Mr. Hogan?"

"Sergeant Hogan that was; Ninth Infantry—the old fightin' Ninth, God bless her!" solemnly returned the other. "I am afraid of one thing, and that is rum. I've just now quit the service for reasons of my own. Oh, I was honorably discharged—no bobtail. And I had it framed up to hike for Chicago and strike my old boss for a job. I drove a truck for him ten years ago. Why are we standin' here in the street like a pair of dummies? I have a bit of a room forninst the avenue yonder, and 'tis paid for till to-morrow. Will ye drop around and rest the sole of your foot and have a bite? I keep my own commissary stocked in case of bein' cut off from my base. It will happen to the best of us."

The grateful freshman felt that he had found a port in a storm. There was something frank and honest in the face and speech of Sergeant Jack Hogan. Already the youngster was stirred by something akin to hero worship. As a small boy, he had longed to go to West Point, and the sight of marching regulars, and the thrilling call of the bugles, and the drums had always made his pulse beat faster. The episode of this chance acquaintance appealed to his impressionable mind as immensely romantic and diverting. He had begun to think there was no such thing as loyal friendship outside the campus, but how splendidly the four "buck privates" had rallied to their comrade's call for help, without delaying an instant to question the odds! The freshman offered him his hand with sincere homage, and said:

"Thank you. I want to talk to you some more. My name is Meserve. I was in Yale College until a few days ago."

Hogan slackened his pace, and shrewdly regarded the tall youth as he made comment in this wise:

"A deserter, are you? An' was it a row with your dad, or a girl, or a shindy with the professors that made you think your fine, young life was all smashed to smithereens? By the look of you, 'tis a good home you're turnin' your back on. I don't mean to butt in, lad; but I'm hot-headed, myself, an' 'twas goin' off at half-cock that has made much heavy trouble for Jack Hogan. Can't we patch things up, and put you back where you belong?"

Thomas shook his head, sullenly obstinate, and walked along in silence. The stalwart sergeant sighed, as if his own thoughts and memories were poor company, and forbore to press the argument. Soon they came to a lodging house, and Hogan led the way to a tiny box of a room which appeared singularly clean and orderly after the dingy, unpleasant halls.

"I scrubbed the floor myself, and tidied up as best I could," explained the lodger. "Dirt worries me. I was rated a smart soldier in camp or barracks. I'm travelin' in light marchin' order at present, but my arms and accoutrements'll stand your inspection."

The freshman gazed with the liveliest interest at a corded bundle of strange weapons standing in a corner.

"Trophies?" he asked.

"Ye might call 'em such," said Hogan, seating himself upon the cot, and waving his guest toward the only chair. "One of them is a Boxer sword, an' the hilt is decorated with the pigtail of the cock-eyed heathen that owned it. I got him with th' bayonet just beyond the mud wall of Tientsin. The Chinos made hash of us there at Tientsin—I was with the Ninth, understand. There was near two hundred good men hit in the two battalions the day we lay on our stummicks in the mud and water and were made targets of. The old man—the colonel—got his. Drilled clean through, he was."

"You marched to Peking against the Boxers?" cried Thomas admiringly.

"An' I lost some good friends, and had domn little loot to show for it. That bolo I fetched away from Samar. We left a whole company there, massacred they was, in a bunch. They died game. Oh, she's the finest fightin' regiment in the service, an' you can track her by her graves from Santiago to the Philippines by way of China. But you're makin' a fool of me, boy. Shall I talk your head off while you're starvin' to death before my eyes? Get busy, Hogan. Sound mess call, you lobster!"

From beneath the cot, he hauled a coffeepot, propped it over the gas jet, fished a loaf of bread and a can of deviled ham from a neatly laced canvas sack, and pulled the corks from two bottles of ginger ale.

"We have rations for two days, but I'll be on my way sooner than that," said Hogan, with bracing assurance. "Help yourself. There's others a heap worse off. For dessert, I'll roll ye a cigarette."

"But how are you going to find a job?" asked Thomas, in whose mind this baffling problem was uppermost. "I'll drive a truck, if I have to, but nobody wants me. They won't even listen to me in this beastly town."

Hogan carelessly flourished a muscular arm, and explained, as if he were addressing a wayward child:

"You look as if you was afraid of hard work, my son. A college rookie is the most useless thing in the world. Now, I have a notion of what is stewin' in your poor, young noodle. You think you're goin' to enlist in the army and win a commission. It has just come to you while you was hearin' my hot air. It's no place for you, understand?"

"Why not?" The freshman flushed, discomfited that he should be so easy to read, and resenting the soldier's verdict.

"Oh, I don't mean to rub you the wrong way, boy; but if you couldn't stick in college, you'd go all to the bad in the army. 'Tis every man for himself there, and the divil takes the hindmost. And, besides, there'd be some broken hearts at home. I won't stand

for it. I like you, and you may have took notice that I'm a determined man. If you won't drop this fool notion, I'll send warnin' to the recruitin' offices to head you off and notify your daddy. Now, will you be good? Have another poke at the ham and bread."

Abashed, and afraid to argue the matter, Thomas Meserve was cornered, with never a plan or purpose in his poor, addled head. Desperately in need of a confidant, he sat slumped upon his chair while he poured out his heart to Sergeant John Hogan, who listened in noncommittal silence. When the pitiful, foolish tale was done, the freshman paused, knitted his brows, and added as an afterthought:

"What else was there for me to do? Tell me that. I was up against it both ways. There never, never was such a horrible, tragical predicament."

Hogan grinned, checked his rising mirth as unseemly, and was moved to say:

"No, I guess there never, never was, you God-forsaken, pig-headed, trouble-hunting young reprobate! And so this is what you call tragical! If you wasn't so near to sheddin' tears, I'd laugh myself black in the face. You had your change, a bigger, better chance than most men, an' you didn't make good. Do you know what a real grown-up man does when he falls down on his duty an' has nobody but himself to blame? He takes his punishment, an' he never squeals. He knows that he got what was comin' to him. *You*, you're a baby, a whimperin' pup—an' you talk of the other 'men' in your college class!"

So fierce was the contempt expressed in the speech and mien of the sergeant, that Tom slunk toward the door, ready to flee this humiliating scene. Hogan put out a long arm, gripped his sleeve, and roughly dragged him back and flung him down on the cot beside him.

"Where was you aimin' to go?" he asked in softer tones. "Home, I hope. I'm talkin' for your own good. You did me a good turn. Now, if you want to work an' earn your salt an' stand on your two feet, you just follow me, an' I'll make a man of you. But no more whining, no more bleatin' about 'tragical predicaments.' You may not thank me, but your father will, some fine day, when Johnny comes marchin' home."

The freshman had not the spirit to resist, nor was he strong enough to face the dreadful prospect of being set adrift again. Stung by the insults with which he had been so ruthlessly bombarded, he plucked up courage to say:

"You are pretty hard on me, sergeant. I am not quite as sandless as all that. You can't scare me into going home, not yet; and, if you are willing to put up with my foolish ways, I swear I'm ready to hunt a job with you."

Hogan beamed good-naturedly, slapped his comrade on the back, and replied, as he began to wash the coffee-pot and the two tin plates with deft quickness:

"We'll cinch those jobs by sundown. They're waitin' for us somewheres. I want a start, that's all. Handlin' men is my trade, an' I'll win my promotion. Ready? Forward, march!"

Hogan pounded down the rickety stairway as if he were leading an invincible storming party. His confidence in himself and the star of his destiny was so stimulating that the freshman no longer felt faint-hearted and "footless."

It seemed to be the most natural thing in the world that he should have linked his fortunes with the turbulent fates that guided the course of Sergeant John Hogan, late of the Ninth United States Infantry. Adventures awaited them. What mattered it that their pockets were empty? They were two musketeers, and the world was their oyster.

Thomas strode beside his bulkier companion, head in air, arms swinging sturdily, going Heaven alone knew where, and saying to himself:

"By George, this is living! There will be something doing, you can just bet, as long as he lets me fight it out with him. I have a hunch that it is coming out right. And, if I ever do go back to college, I may have a few

stories to tell the fellows that will make them sit up."

They passed an army recruiting office, and, when Thomas lingered to stare at the gaudy poster, Hogan took him by the collar and led him onward, grimly chuckling as he read the lively interest in the youngster's ingenuous countenance.

"That is the last resort, my boy. My old pals expect me back, but we'll fool them, this time. I caught sight of another poster from the tail of my eye just before I came uptown this mornin'. It looked good to me, but I had my eighty dollars then, an' I was steppin' high and scornful."

"Is it the navy?" eagerly asked the freshman. "That wouldn't be so bad in a pinch."

"I didn't look close, but it struck me as kind of am-amphibious like—web-footed jobs for husky men, as I sized it up. 'Any port in a storm,' is my battle cry this afternoon. It's not far from here."

Tom fought back his curiosity, and had little more to say until Hogan quickened his swinging gait and veered across the street toward a group of seedy, trampish-looking men in front of an office doorway. Posted behind them was a placard reading:

MEN WANTED.

FLORIDA RAILWAY AND NAVIGATION CO.

Laborers, $1.75 a Day and Board.
Transportation Furnished.

Comfortable Quarters, Good Treatment.
Railroad Construction—Work in a Semi-Tropical Climate.

"That looks like a tough proposition to me," was the doleful observation of Thomas Meserve, as Hogan shouldered a path through the idling crowd. "I'd last about a minute as a laborer in a semi-tropical climate."

"Tut, tut, hush your fuss," muttered the other behind his hand. "Don't squeal until you are bit. This is my game, and I'm goin' to play it strong. Me a laborer? I've heard of this bit of railroad work. They have mustered five thousand of the toughest tarriers alive down yonder on those Florida keys, and what they are cryin' for is foremen to handle 'em. 'Tis my lawful trade, as I told you. The railroad recruitin' officer can sign me on for one seventy-five per, but for how long?"

"Where do I come in?" anxiously, almost tearfully persisted the fugitive freshman, his dreams shorn of their glamour in a twinkling. "I can't lick five plug-uglies at once. This may be your game, but it is too blame strong for me."

"S-s-sh! There you go, bleatin', which I strictly forbade you." The soldier's accents were severe. "Won't they be needin' clerks and storekeepers and commissary bosses, and such like? An', as soon as ever I'm a boss, which won't be long, I'll be wantin' a timekeeper. 'Tis a grand chance for good men that can steer clear o' rum. Come along, now."

Hogan thrust a squad of applicants this way and that, eying the bleary, broken outcasts with huge disfavor, and addressed the employment agent without wasting words:

"John Hogan is my name. No home address. Last job, second sergeant D Company, Ninth United States Infantry. Here's my discharge papers."

The harassed agent, weary of sifting the wretched material that drifted past his desk, surveyed this fine specimen of a man as if he were a most refreshing sight, and curtly replied:

"Good! You'll do. I wish you had fetched your whole company. Step into the next room and get your orders and transportation papers. Special train leaves the Pennsylvania Station at seven to-night. Are you broke? Want a supper ticket?"

"Two of them; thank you, sir," said Hogan, pulling Thomas to the front. "This lad goes with me, for better or worse. He's in rotten bad company, barrin' meself, but he is ready to enlist."

Poor Tom Meserve, always smartly, fastidiously attired, even in adversity, looked indeed as if he had fallen among

thieves. His incongruous plight awoke the calloused interest of the agent, who asked gruffly:

"Ever do a day's work? We don't want deadwood on our hands. Oh, pshaw! You are clean and sober, and I am shy seventy men for my shipment to-night. What's your name? You don't have to give your real one, you know."

Tom blushed to the ears, looked helplessly at Hogan, and blurted:

"T. Whittaker. No address."

A little later, this pair of duly enrolled laborers were permitted to be at large for a last glimpse of the city and its civilization which had cast them out. Thomas was in a dazed mood. He recalled dreams whose events had seemed far more real and coherent than the things that had happened to him during this incredibly crowded day. He was beginning vaguely to realize that he had made many kinds of a fool of himself, yet he was sternly resolved not to show the white feather. There must be no more "bleating," and if "Yale sand" meant anything at all, now was the time for him to play the man.

There was something mysteriously uplifting and bracing in the companionship of Hogan, a supreme confidence in his manner of facing the world, which seemed to guarantee success in whatever he undertook; a headlong contempt of obstacles, which, more than ever, caught hold of the lad's imagination and blinded him to the folly of the flight to the Florida keys.

They hurried to the hotel, where Thomas planned to leave his trunk in storage as a pledge for the trifling sum owing for his room; and, while he was packing a suit case for the march, the sergeant cocked his wise head to read the initials painted thereon.

"T. W. M., Jr.," he said to himself. "Then his old man has the same name, and he lives in Cleveland, does he? Here goes for a small bit of strategy of my own."

Devising an excuse to go to the office, Hogan sought a desk and stationery and made use of a sputtering pen with this result:

MR. THOMAS W. MESERVE, SENIOR.

DEAR SIR: Unbeknown to your son, I have the honor to inform you that the undersigned has this day took command of him. I tried my hardest to make him go home and show a grain of sense, but he is not as old as he will be some day, which you know yourself, and maybe it will do him some good to get up against it good and hard. I am going to put him to work. It won't be as easy as college, but his diploma will be worth having. I like the boy, but he has been mishandled something fierce. It wouldn't be square to give him away and tell you what his game is. But you can bet your last blue chip that his bunkie will see no harm comes to him. Pass the word to his mother that Thomas is going strong and aims to land on his feet before he wigwags any messages to the old folks at home. We are ready to vamoose from little old New York to-night to hit the trail for a place where good men are in great demand, and not in the army, either. Our jobs are cinched. With kind regards, I am respectfully your humble servant,

JOHN HOGAN,
Ex-Sergeant, 9th U. S. Infantry.

"When I run away from home, I'd ha' been grateful to the lad that would have took the trouble to do the same favor for me," reflected the writer, as he ransacked his pockets for pennies, and was delighted to find the price of a postage stamp. "Boys are sure heartless that way, and 'tis a wonder that parents have courage to raise 'em at all. All Thomas can think of is his own troubles, and they aren't heavy enough to make a dent in a feather bed if you dropped them off the roof. Why I have took him in tow, I dunno. But I'll kill him or cure him; so help me."

III.

Tom Meserve was vainly trying to sleep in a day coach crowded with shouting, swearing men, many of whom had set forth on their journey with flasks of bad whisky as their only luggage. They jested and quarreled and sang in many tongues, for the labor dragnet had swept up Italians, Polacks, Norwegians, and men from all the world who must work or starve. Even the undaunted Hogan looked them over with disgusted amazement as

the sorriest lot of vagrants, scarecrows, and blackguards he had ever seen herded together. For the most part, they were refuse, and the sergeant glanced at the lad swaying drowsily beside him, and murmured, under his breath:

"The Florida Railway an' Navigation Company must be domned unpopular, or the country is goin' to the dogs. I never thought there was so much scum of humanity adrift in one town. There isn't a day's work in a dozen of them. The better chance for a good man, Hogan. Buck up, my boy. Yale College was never like this, hey, Tommy? 'Tis a fine temperance lesson, though. The car is full of horrible examples. Look what it has done to 'em, for the love o' Heaven. I'll bet I can find more'n one college man aboard this train, most likely cursin' the day he was born."

The vile air, the heavy stench of stale tobacco smoke, and the reek of alcohol were suffocating. Thomas shuddered and withdrew his head from the open window long enough to reply with as brave a smile as he could muster:

"It's all right, Jack. If you can stand it, I can. They are pretty awful, aren't they? I have seen hoboes, but I never banked on having to live with them. Two days and nights of this game will make me sore on the doctrine of the brotherhood of man."

Hogan beamed hopefully, as if his own faith were unshaken, and foraged in his canvas sack, which yielded up several sandwiches wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

"The last of the bread an' diviled ham," he explained. "'Twould have been a sin to waste 'em. 'Tis a true sayin' that an army marches on its stummick. Eat hearty."

Thomas munched his ration, then let his head rest upon the window sill and wearily closed his eyes. The sergeant tried to read the torn newspaper, and presently turned the sheet. With an oath, he grasped the startling import of a string of huge black headlines which ran across this page of the blatantly yellow journal:

FEARFUL SUFFERINGS OF THE WHITE SLAVES TOILING ON THE FLORIDA KEYS.

Stories of Refugees Who Have Escaped From Their Brutal Captors.

THOUSANDS OF LABORERS COMPELLED TO ENDURE INCREDIBLE HARDSHIPS IN TERROR OF LASH AND PISTOL.

Hogan read no farther than this. A shadow fell athwart the page, and he glanced up just as the brawny agent in charge of the party snatched the newspaper from his hands and tore it to bits with angry haste. The soldier leaped to his feet in fierce resentment; but checked himself lest he awaken his companion, who had suddenly drifted into slumber. With a warning gesture, he beckoned the agent to follow him to the end of the car, where he grimly told him:

"You are playing in luck that I didn't wipe this dirty floor up with you, my man. You got very gay with me, and you are not dealing with the scrapin's of hell that comprises the rest of your cargo, understand? Now, how about it? I intend to keep it dark from the lad that's with me. On the level, has this newspaper got it straight? You can't scare me out, but it isn't too late to save the youngster."

The agent had been picked for brawn and courage, and he looked the sergeant between the eyes as he returned:

"No, Hogan, the newspapers have faked a lot of that stuff. Between you and me, building a railroad across the Florida keys is no giddy, gilt-edged picnic, specially in the summer time. Good men who can get better jobs at construction work out West won't go down there. We get the leavings, and we expect to get our money out of 'em." He shook his clinched fist in a burst of gusty wrath as he added: "Are we going to lug 'em fifteen hundred miles and let 'em quit before they have worked out their transportation?"

"I notice that you have locked the doors of the cars," dryly remarked Ho-

gan. "An' this drove of cattle didn't read the newspapers or they wouldn't be here. I forgive you for what you did to me. I'm glad my bunkie didn't see the paper. You're a man, all right. So am I. White slaves, eh? The joke is on them. I'm goin' down there to be one of the cruel, brutal captors."

Hogan swaggered back to his seat, perturbed and very uneasy, for all his cocksure bravado. He was not in the least afraid for himself, but his responsibility for the fate of the slumbering freshman was pulling at his heart. This rôle of protector, guide, and champion had begun to awaken impulses and instincts of affection which it would not have been far-fetched to call paternal. He stood in the aisle, frowning down at the lad who had never known hardship or physical danger, who had been sheltered all his days from the world's rough hand.

"God knows what I'm leadin' him into!" thought Hogan. "But he is as helpless as a stray kitten, an' I never yet turned me back on what I had once set out to do. You are booked to go the route to the finish, Mister Thomas Whittaker Meserve, Junior. An' whatever it is, it can do you no more harm than loafin' an' foolin' your way through college, a sorrow to your parents an' a nuisance to your friends. 'Footless,' he called himself. 'Tis a new word, and a polite one for a fool."

Oblivious of this affectionate condemnation, Thomas slept fitfully while the sergeant slipped his arm under the youngster's head and let it rest there until the muscles were cramped.

The long, wretched night wore on to daylight, and the sodden company in the car became quieter. Haggard, unshaven, many of them ragged, they sprawled grotesquely across the seats, a picture for none other than Hogarth. When the train halted at Richmond, negroes came aboard to distribute pails of coffee and sandwiches as breakfast, but the men were not allowed to disembark, and the viligant agent in charge drove away the newsboys who were crying: "Latest Philadelphia, New York, and Washington papers."

"By Jingo, this is too much like being kidnapped," yawned the freshman. "I want to get out and stretch my legs, Jack. Don't you think we ought to object?"

"Wait till you can put it in writing," was the tactful reply. "'Twill do no good to kick to the non-coms. If some of these thirsty tarriers smelled a grogshop in the town, they couldn't be dragged back to the train. On one of these personally conducted tours to the swell resorts of Florida, you have to do as you're told."

Feeling somewhat refreshed, Thomas began to study his neighbors with lively curiosity. A handsome, though dissipated-looking, young Englishman across the aisle made friendly advances, as if recognizing one of his own species; and a round-shouldered little man, timid, wrinkled, gray, halted to pass the time of day. Quite obviously they had fallen from better days than these.

The Englishman had been singing at intervals all through the night until his bottle was empty. He had a tenor voice of beautiful quality and considerable cultivation, and his choice of melodies ran, for the most part, to old country ballads, which moved some of his audience to tears that were not altogether maudlin. Something in the way he carried himself made Hogan murmur to the freshman:

"He has seen service, an' with smart troops at that. A cashiered officer, or I miss my guess."

The gray, timid little man babbled of his troubles, and found friendly ears. He was a bookkeeper, cast off after thirty years of drudgery, driven to this last extremity to keep body and soul together. Hogan resolved to help him somehow. He appealed to the soldier's sympathies as even more forlorn and helpless than the freshman. For the rest of this motley company he cared not a straw. If he were given authority over them, he would drive them until they dropped in their tracks. He meant to climb over them and kick them out of his way.

Weary and disheveled and begrimed,

these sorry laborers came, at length, to the sandy pine and palmetto lands of Florida, and were hauled southward in the blistering summer heat, farther and farther, until the journey seemed to have no end. Past the blue lagoons of the Indian River, in sight of the deserted winter hotels of Palm Beach, beside miles of ripening pineapple patches and stately clusters of cocoanuts, the dusty train crawled toward the remote wilderness of the scattering keys that trail down to the Gulf and the tip of the peninsula. The railroad left the last town behind it, and ran through miles and miles of desolate swamp, wire-grass, and water and tiny islands stretching to the horizon in sad, unchanging monotony.

Mosquitoes, clouds of them, poured into the open windows and drove the men mad with irritation, until a fresh salt wind came surging from the nearby sea and brought relief. It was late afternoon when the rough-laid track began to cross one long trestle after another that bridged stretches of open water of marvelous, shimmering hues of green and blue and violet.

The pilgrims who crowded the car platforms shouted with profane surprise. At one side, the ocean itself ran clear and unbroken to the skyline; at the other, the bright water was dotted with low, ragged keys, green with lush mangrove bushes.

The railroad was pushing its way southward from one of these keys to the next, built over the Atlantic itself —so bold and staggering a project, even in this first glimpse, that the uppermost emotion of the laborers was sheer wonderment.

At sunset, the train finally halted. Pell-mell, its passengers tumbled out. In front of them, to the southward, a half-built trestle stretched its spidery length clean into open sea, and in the waning light no land could be seen beyond. Tom Meserve laughed aloud, and cried:

"Oh, it looks so sweet and clean and big, Jack. This is worth coming to see, isn't it? You knew what you were doing. I am glad I came."

"It is sure a duck-footed railroad proposition, Tommy. But what next, I wonder? Do we swim for it? Ho, there she comes. Who could have guessed this would turn out to be a yachting excursion?"

A stern-wheeled steamer, relic of busier days on the Mississippi, was coughing and churning her way to a temporary wharf to seaward of the track; and, at the shouted order, the party trooped to meet her.

Her towering cabins and ornate trimmings were dingy and shabby, all her brave tinsel, gilt, and glitter neglected and battered. She seemed a fit craft to carry this forlorn shipload of human relics, who were herded aboard without ceremony.

Presently the lines were cast off, and in the fleeting tropical twilight the steamer moved slowly away from the key, the unfinished trestle indicating her mysterious course like a huge finger.

"There's five thousand men quartered somewhere out yonder," said Hogan, "though I see nothin' but water and more of it. If we are to be dumped on one of these stray bits of rock they call keys, I wish they'd jack it about ten feet higher above sea level. It's the skimpiest-lookin' real estate for a man that can't swim that ever I seen. Not that I borrow trouble at any stage of the game; but I come down here to build a railroad, not to wear myself out speculatin' whether the next high tide is goin' to lug me off to sea, feet first."

"Wait till a hurricane comes hoppin' up from the West Indies," gloomily put in a roustabout at his elbow. "I don't like the looks of it. I'm goin' back to New York. This is all to the bad."

Hogan grinned at recollection of the "white slave" headlines in the yellow journal, and replied:

"Nobody is stopping you. Why don't you start, me bucko?"

The uneasy sentiment of the roustabout was echoed along the crowded upper deck of the *Memphis Queen*. Vanishing to rearward of them was the

railroad and the mainland; and somewhere in this uncanny, remote world of ocean and desolate islets, almost submerged, they were to be dumped and marooned. Building a railroad here was some kind of a grim, colossal joke. Past one lonely key after another, the steamer lumbered noisily. The trestle had been left far behind. Darkness fell, and many lights twinkled like fireflies from the dim bits of shore.

"Those are camps," said Hogan. "Now you know your fate, Tommy. You will be combin' centipeds from your hair to-morrow mornin'. And you can't run away, this time, if you take a notion."

The freshman was not in a whining mood. The bigness of the work caught hold of his imagination. This flinging a railroad to Key West, a dot on the map nearer Cuba than his own country, was worth playing even the humblest part in. Man had matched his wit and courage against the might of the Atlantic in a splendidly audacious encounter. With unwonted earnestness, he cried:

"I don't want to run away, Jack. I'll bet I can make a place for myself here somewhere, even if I was no good where I came from. I suppose we'll have to start in with pick and shovel; but I don't care."

"Good boy, Tommy. Take it as it comes, an' don't mind the blisters, an' you and I will get our fightin' chance. There is our happy home yonder. The packet is headin' for shore."

The *Memphis Queen* slid over a shallow lagoon, and her flat bottom grated across the coral reefs as she fetched up beside a flimsy wooden pier. Foremen from the camp ashore hurried on board and roughly ordered the passengers to disembark and form in line on the beach.

Hogan and Tom hung back, and were joined by the tuneful Englishman and the agitated old bookkeeper. The quartette filed to the beach and followed the long column toward the supply tents, where blankets were served out, and the men assigned in groups to the canvas sleeping quarters arranged along rude streets in which driftwood fires were smouldering.

The scene was singularly picturesque. To Hogan it recalled the camp life of his army days, and Thomas felt as if he had stumbled across a nest of buccaneers of the Spanish Main.

The sergeant headed toward the beach, and chose a small tent, pitched where the sea breeze gushed cool from the near-by lagoon. It was already tenanted, but the experienced man of action unceremoniously bundled the occupants out neck and crop, and was indifferent to their outcry.

"I say, you have a way with you," drawled the Englishman. "My name is Fitzherbert. Do you mind if I join your mess? Really I can't stand the rest of these swine."

"Pick the softest palmetto roots, an' welcome to ye," cordially replied Hogan. "I sized you up in the train as the right kind."

A small voice arose in the darkness as the bookkeeper said tremulously:

"I don't want to intrude, but is there room for me? I have not had time to get my bearings, and shall be very grateful——"

"Not another word, Mr. Jones. 'Tis a compliment to us," returned the host. "The Hotel de Hogan will not turn away a guest that is decent an' sober—an' there will be no great rush at that."

The camp was noisy and astir only for a little while. Worn out by the hardships of the long journey, the newcomers craved sleep, and dropped in their tracks as soon as they had found tent room. The toilers who had sweated all day with the grading gangs were in no mood for late hours, and the populous key became almost silent.

Hogan, who was wakeful, heard the Englishman snoring at his side, and wondered what the morrow had in store for the youth so strangely pitchforked into this rough-and-tumble field of action. Then the sergeant's thoughts veered to the darkened camp, and he said to himself:

"What keeps me awake, I wonder?

I know! 'Tis missin' the sentries. I'm expectin' to hear a flat-footed private go poundin' past my tent. But they need no sentries here. These hoboes couldn't desert if they wanted to, bein' entirely surrounded by water—an' a most amazin' lot of it."

Hogan poked his head out, and blinked at the stars. The mosquitoes were troublesome, for the breeze was dying, and he had a sudden yearning for a whiff or two at his black pipe. His hospitality had somewhat crowded the tent; and, in order to stretch his legs and rid himself of the kinks of travel, he decided to amble down to the beach and commune with his reflections at his ease.

Over the white sand the tide was lapping in whispering ripples. Toward the open sea, a bright light winked at regular intervals, and the soldier thought of the many lighthouses he had watched gleam their welcomes and farewells to the transports which had carried him around the world. Once he sighed heavily, as if in his wanderings the light o' love had dropped below his horizon to shine for him no more.

Many, many nights of bivouac and trail in hostile jungles of the Philippines had made him vigilant and quick of ear, intuitively suspicious of whatever moved in the darkness. He had been musing and walking to and fro longer than he was aware, when, from somewhere along the shrouded key, his alert hearing noted the soft splash of oars. Some belated party might be returning from a camp on another key, and it was merely idle curiosity that made Hogan saunter quietly in that direction.

The dense, twisted mangrove bushes grew nearer the water's edge as he advanced, and screened the shore beyond. Moving quietly, as was his habit, Hogan wormed along the outer line of this tropical undergrowth, becoming more curious and interested, for he began to comprehend that it was the intention of the men in the boat to make a landing in no frank and open fashion. The stealthy drip and splash of the oars was drawing nearer, and he could hear a murmur of hushed voices in strenuous argument.

Hogan stepped back into the mangrove thicket, and was completely ambushed. Presently, the craft was almost abreast of his hiding place, and he was able to discern that it was a small sloop with a canvas trunk cabin. Four or five men were plying oars and poles with wary deliberation, frequently delaying to listen and reconnoitre. During one of these pauses, Hogan heard the man at the tiller mutter angrily:

"We ain't gwine no nearer the camp than this, I tell you. This is jest where they tole us to wait for 'em. I reckon it's most ten o'clock, ain't it? That's the time they said they'd sneak down to the beach."

"Half an hour mo' to wait, by my guess," said another voice. "We kin go closer'n this, cap'n. We ain't never run a cargo to this camp, an' there won't be no guards lookin' for a booze boat, nohow. The engineer in charge of this camp is sick with fever, they tell me. He won't be snoopin' around."

"Shet up. I'm boss this trip," snarled the man at the tiller. "I've been runnin' booze boats outen Key West since the railroad come to these keys, an' they ain't never ketched me yet. Let your anchor down easy, Jerry."

"How much you got aboard?" queried a dark figure with an oar.

"Ten cases of quart bottles, and twenty dozen pint flasks," answered the "cap'n." "And, talk about your whisky, gem'men! There's a jolt in every swaller, an' a jag in every gill. They git their money's wuth, you bet."

While Hogan listened, his wrath waxed hotter and hotter. Aside from his own private and particular grudge against rum for what it had done to him in other days, he knew better than most men what the success of this infernal "booze boat" would mean to the construction camp on the key.

Evidently smuggling rotten whisky to the thousands of laborers was an organized traffic. The stuff had pow-

er to turn the sleeping camp into a hell of fighting, riot, uproar, and perhaps murder. And the fact that the railroad company permitted no saloons on the keys accounted for the harrowing tales of hardships and cruelty which the refugees had given to the yellow newspapers in New York. The humor of this phase of it stirred Hogan to say to himself:

"There couldn't be no worse torture for most of these 'white slaves' than to find themselves spraddled out on one of these keys with never a drink at all for love or money. No wonder they holler for vengeance when they hit the Bowery again."

Hogan's duty was clear in his mind. To try to board and capture the "booze boat," single-handed, was more than he dared undertake. Most likely the smugglers were armed, and ready to fight their way clear. They must not be allowed to land their cargo. Moreover, this was a rare chance for teaching them a lesson that would nip the ardor of the other ruffians engaged in the traffic.

Hogan knew not where to muster help in the camp. If the laborers got wind of his proposed raid they would muster to the defense of the imperiled "booze boat." He swore by all the gods of war and other deities of his vivid vocabulary that there should be a wholesale smashing of heads and whisky bottles, and groped a tortuous, cat-footed course through the mangrove in the direction of the silent camp.

When he drew near to his own tent he moved with even more care, for he did not wish to arouse the freshman; and, wriggling inside, he felt in his canvas sack for a Colt's army revolver. Meserve stirred, and asked sleepily:

"What is it, Jack? I woke up and missed you a while ago, and it was dreadfully lonesome without you."

"Just enjoyin' the starlight," whispered the sergeant. "Roll over an' pound your ear again."

"Are you going out again?" demanded Tom, whose eyes were wide open by now. "What's doing? This is such a spooky sort of a place that I hate to see you go wandering off."

Hogan was perplexed. He wished no harm to befall his bunkie, yet the youth would never forgive him if he were left out of this adventure. Quickly deciding to confide in him, the sergeant told him to slip on his shoes and come into the open without waking Fitzherbert and Jones. As they walked along the lane between the tents, Hogan tersely told what he had seen and heard, and gave his orders:

"Now, I wouldn't have anythin' happen to you for worlds, an' you must promise to keep clear of the ruction. I am thinkin' of your folks at home, understand? I am goin' to find the engineer's headquarters where the bosses live, bein' used to finding things in dark nights and strange places. You sneak down to the beach and along in the bushes to your left till you come to a bit of a cove. There you stay an' watch out if that boat shifts her moorin's. There is no danger. The pirates don't dare come ashore. If you hear men comin' down from the camp—hoboes, I mean—don't let 'em see you. Never mind my surprise party. I don't want you in it."

"Oh, please, Jack, I'm not sandless. I belong with you. Don't treat me like a baby," pleaded Tom, his knees oddly shaky, but his voice fairly steady.

Hogan grasped the freshman by the shoulders, spun him about like a top, and shoved him roughly toward the beach, while he growled in his ear:

"Obey orders. Get to it. It's time you learned the rudiments of discipline."

Thomas moved rapidly, nor looked behind him, afraid of being pursued and spanked. The sergeant strode inland, surmising that the headquarters of the camp must be at some distance from the tents of the rank and file. Ere long he stumbled over a sleepy watchman, who was seeking respite from mosquitoes to leeward of a green wood "smudge"; and, heaving this culprit to the feet by his collar, Hogan queried indignantly:

"On your rounds, are you? The guardhouse for yours. Take me to the big boss of this outfit or his staff, *pronto.*"

"Who — what the — yes, indeed. What's wrong?" gasped the watchman, as his startled vision took in the shadowy bulk of his captor. "Take your hands off me."

"When you deliver the goods," replied Hogan. "I mistrust you was induced to stay away from the beach till after ten o'clock, an' you will be givin' no alarms to your friends."

The unhappy prisoner shuddered and ceased to squirm, nor could he find courage to frame a defense against this damning indictment. Soon they came to a group of bungalows set in a tall cluster of cocoanut palms, and the watchman feebly sputtered:

"The division engineer is sick abed. Shall I wake him up?"

"No, he must have some non-coms. Hustle, now."

Two foremen and an assistant engineer were aroused by the fist of Hogan beating a violent tattoo on their flimsy doors; and at the noise the engineer himself came out in pajamas, weak of body and tremulous of speech, but ready to command the situation. Hogan saluted and explained:

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, an' may you feel better soon, but I have marked down a booze boat from Key West ready to land an ungodly cargo of hell water, an' I want help to capture it. Will you do me the favor of lendin' me half a dozen good men?"

"All you want, and thanks," cried the plucky engineer. "The nerve of the scoundrels! Right under my nose! And I have been bragging that my key was clear of them."

He stepped to the door, lighted a candle, and thrust it close to Hogan's face.

"Who the deuce are you?" was the amazed interrogation. "I never clapped eyes on you. I thought you were one of the watchmen."

"I arrived with to-night's excursion party—one seventy-five per day, sir," grinned the soldier. "John Hogan, if you please, late sergeant Ninth United States Infantry, God bless her! I came across the booze runners by accident. I know what the stuff will do to a camp of hard men. 'Tis my mortal foe. What's the orders, sir?"

There was sincere gratification in the voice of the engineer as he replied:

"Sergeant Hogan, you will take command. Sorry, but I'm too seedy to risk it. Here, McGuire and Davenport, find some men you can trust. Hurley, trot over and fetch two sticks of dynamite from the cut. The shotguns are locked in the tool house. Blow 'em out of water if you can. Hogan here has earned the right to lead you, and you will agree with me there. Good luck. I shall be waiting for news."

"A man after my own heart," said Hogan to Foreman McGuire, as they began to muster their little force. "He didn't waste a word. An' he gives us dynamite for ammunition. Why, this beats war! Booze boats are unpopular with him, eh?"

"The sight of one big drunk in this camp 'u'd convince you that he is right," vouchsafed McGuire. "The law is no good to us here. I advise you to take him at his word and toss the sticks aboard if you come in range."

Soberly elated was the heart of Jack Hogan. What a splendid stroke of luck! The engineer had known a good man at sight—even by candlelight. And here was a piece of work precisely to his taste. God was indeed good to the Irish, and here was promotion already. The foreman bore him no ill will for being put in charge of the expedition, and viewed it as a soldier's duty. At his suggestion they made a detour of the camp, and scrambled across the ledges of limestone and coral in order to attract no attention.

The hour lacked but a few minutes of ten, and the possibility of a clash with the men who had agreed to meet the "booze boat" was imminent. Hogan had begun to worry for the safety of the freshman. The soldier had been on fire with the joyous excitement of his own enterprise, and now that he was cooler and more steady-minded.

he feared lest he might have sent Thomas on a fool's errand.

How was the boy to distinguish friend from foe? To post off in the darkness on outpost duty was the most matter-of-fact business for a man like Hogan, and perhaps he had hastily taken too much for granted in the case of the raw and untried youth, who had never faced a situation in the least resembling this.

The attacking party crept along the edge of the strip of beach, picked a way among the mangrove roots, and came to the tiny cove where Thomas had been ordered to wait as a lone sentinel.

Hogan halted, and looked in vain for his young comrade. Then he whistled very softly and listened, painfully expectant, with a sharp sense of dread and apprehension. Creeping forward on hands and knees, he peered beyond the bight of the shore line toward the place where he had last seen the boat, and where he had hidden himself. The dim outline of the sloop's hull had vanished, and her slender mast no longer cut a black line athwart the starry sky.

Hogan rubbed his eyes, and swore under his breath. Unable to convince himself that the craft had stolen away, he told the others to stay where they were, while he moved ahead of them.

Presently he stumbled over the stranded log, upon which he had sat and listened to the talk of the crew of the boat. She was no longer there, nor could he anywhere discern a shadow moving across the placid lagoon, nor hear the faintest sound of oars or creaking blocks.

The outlaws had taken alarm and flown, or else the militant temperance expedition of Sergeant Hogan had come too late. The latter conjecture was almost instantly discarded, for there was a noise of moving men to rearward of him, and then came a tumult of surprised shouts and malediction.

The sergeant plowed his way to the scene, and found that his men had intercepted the course of the laborers from the camp, and were engaged in making them prisoners without sparing fists and gun butts.

It was a lively scrimmage, soon finished, and, as the disappointed, thirsty laborers were kicked and hustled toward the camp, Foreman McGuire declaimed to Hogan:

"It will be some satisfaction to line up these dirty dogs and learn who they are. They will be sick of this night's work before we are done with 'em. Our engineer is making a record for grading and filling on this key, and a few rum soaks would put the camp on the bum, would they, and make us a black disgrace before all the other gangs between Bahia Honda and the mainland!"

"Another horrible outrage for the New York papers," said Hogan. "I'll go with you as far as headquarters an' report to the boss, an' then I must hotfoot it back to my tent to make sure my bunkie has found his way home. He lays heavy on my mind, for I can't understand why he was not at the cove to tip us off that the boat had slipped away."

The sergeant ran toward the beach at full speed, a prey to grievous misgivings, berating himself for having permitted Thomas to take part in the adventure. Alas! he found no freshman in the tent. Rudely arousing the others, he fiercely demanded of Fitzherbert:

"Have ye seen the lad? Didn't he come back to bed at all?"

"My word, what is the row?" snorted the Briton, in great bewilderment. "I was dreaming of a jolly good dinner at the Savoy, and you chivvied me out of at least three courses, by Jove! Is the boy mislaid, do you say? No, old chap, I can't account for him."

"Then turn out and help me find him," commanded Hogan. "No, thank you, Mr. Jones. Better stay here. I don't want to lose you, too."

The bookkeeper was nervously fumbling with his buttons, but before he could get himself together Hogan and Fitzherbert were running up the street

to assemble a searching party. McGuire was discerned through a lighted window of the engineer's bungalow, and the sergeant knocked and entered with brief apology.

"It goes against me to trouble a sick man, sir," he breathlessly exclaimed, "but I don't know where else to turn for help. I fetched a fine lad down here with me to make a man of him, an' he is missin', sir. He was doin' sentry forninst the booze boat, an' I mistrust they got him, somehow."

"Get some lanterns, McGuire," said the engineer. "Wake up the crews of both launches. The searchlights may be of use. But it's almost hopeless to try to overhaul the booze boat among the keys at night. If you don't find the young man, tell the skipper of the *Bonita* to run to Key West, and you go with him. Report the case there, and try to head the rascals off before they make port."

The searchers beat up and down the shore, and the launches cruised until after midnight, playing their searchlights over the dark water, and along the beaches, and the fringing thickets of mangrove. But there was no trace of the boy. Thomas Whittaker, as he was entered upon the pay roll of the camp, had vanished.

The sergeant had no thought of sleep, and daylight found him still ransacking the cove and the undergrowth, haggard, despairing, his heart filled with sorrow and remorse.

The continuation of this story will appear, two weeks later, in the issue dated January 15th, which will be on sale December 25th.

SIZING UP THE COMMUTER

PERHAPS you have grinned as you watched a bunch of commuters hurrying to trains and ferries with their parcels; but you may not have realized that carrying parcels is a fine art. Just notice, next time you see a man you know carrying a parcel, and see if what the writer says is true. Each person has his own peculiar way of carrying a parcel. If he is a man of cautious disposition he carries the parcel clutched tightly in his left hand. If it is too large to carry like that he does not carry it at all, but sends it home by the parcel delivery. Such a man is not only cautious; he is stubborn and painfully slow of speech and thought, but is home-abiding and of unquestionable honesty. The man who carries the parcel in his right hand has all those qualities, but in a modified degree.

A man who stumbles up the stairs of the elevated with a package tucked under his arm, inclining backward and down at a decided angle, is good-natured, but rather pessimistic; and he might, if things went against him too hard, take refuge in drink. If the parcel tilts up, he holds a more optimistic view of life in general, and likes to tell funny stories.

The man who carries a parcel hugged up close to his coat front is jealous and inclined to be stingy. Still, he can be managed; and if his wife has the knack of winding him round her finger she can easily be the best-dressed woman in the neighborhood, because he has the money to do it with.

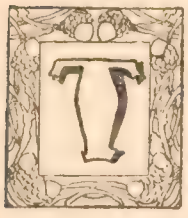
The commuter who ties the parcel he has to take home with a heavy string, and goes along swinging it by the loop made for that purpose, is the most lovable chap of all, but he is also the most unreliable, because he is a spendthrift, and is so prodigal of his affections that the many women to whom he is sure to make love are apt to pass through some extremely uncomfortable days and nights before they get to know what his real intentions are.

Told in the Storm

By Rex Beach

Author of "The Spoilers," "The Barrier," Etc.

For mastery of dramatic situation and insight into human motives, there are few writers who have ever excelled Rex Beach. The remark of a famous critic—"His short stories are novels written small"—is especially significant of Mr. Beach's work, of which the following tale is a fine example.



HE front room of the road house was deserted, save for the slumbering bartender back-tilted in a corner, his chin upon his chest, and one other man who sat in the glare of a swing lamp, playing solitaire. It was perhaps three hours after midnight; the last carouser had turned in; there was no sound save the scream of the black night and the cry of the salt wind. At intervals, only, when the storm lulled, there came the sound of many men asleep.

I stumbled out from the rear room, heavy-eyed, half clad, and of a vicious temper, dressing, in sour silence, beside the stove.

"Did they wake you up?" the card player inquired.

"Yes."

"Me, too. I'd rather bunk in with a herd of walruses in the mating season."

He was a long, slim man, with blue-black hair and a gas-bleached face of startling pallor, from which glittered two wild and roving eyes, that flitted in and out of my visual line, toward, to, and past me, with a baffling, elusive glimmer like that of jet spangles. His hands were slender and bony and colorless, but while he talked they worked, each independently. They performed queer, wizard antics with the cards, one-handed cuts, rapid, fluttering shuffles and "frame-ups," after each pass, leaving the pile of pasteboards as square-edged and even as before.

While he observed me over-shoulder, one hand wandered to some scattered poker chips, which clicked together beneath his touch into a solid ivory column as if separately magnetized. He shuffled and dealt and cut the disks and made them do odd capers like the cards.

"I slept in a menagerie tent once," said he, "but these people have got it on the animals." He nodded toward the sleeping quarters.

"The open life seems to make a Pan's pipe out of the human nose," said I, with disgust.

My indignation was intense and underlaid with a sullen fury at losing my rest. I seized the stranger and led him with me to the open door, saying roughly:

"Listen to that!"

The room was large and low, dim-lighted, and walled with tiers of canvas-bottomed "standees," three high. The floor was a litter of boots; the benches piled with garments. Every bed was full, and the place groaned with sounds of strangulation, asphyxiation, and other disagreeable demises.

The bunks were peopled by tortured bodies which seemed to cry of throttlings, garrotings, and sundry hideous punishments. My nervous system, unable to stand it, had risen a-quiver, then shrieked for mercy.

From the nearest sleeper came the most unhappy sounds. He snored at free and easy intervals with the voice of a whistling buoy in a ground swell —a handsome, resonant intake that died away reluctantly, then changed to a loathsome gurgle, as if he blew his breath through a tube into a pot of thick liquid. Now and then he smacked his lips and ground his teeth until the gooseflesh on my neck arose.

"That's the feller that drove me out," said my new acquaintance, as we went back to our seats beside the stove. "I had the berth below him. I sleep light, anyhow, since I woke up one night, down on the Texas Panhandle, and found a Chinaman a-straddle of my brisket with a butcher knife."

"That must have been nice," said I, at random. "What did you do?"

"I doubled up my legs and kicked him into the camp fire." The stranger was dealing the cards again, this time into a fanlike, intricate solitaire, much affected by gamblers.

"I tried the trick again to-night, but I went wrong. I wanted to stop the swan song of the guy over my head, so I lifted up my feet and put them where the canvas sagged lowest, then I stretched my legs like a Jap juggler, but I fetched away my own bunk and came down on the man below. I broke a snore short off in him. He'll never get it out unless he has it pulled. That was us you heard two hours ago."

I was too tired and sleepy to talk, for I had come down from the hills the previous afternoon to find the Equinoctial raging, and, as a result, the road house full from floor to ridgepole with the motley crew that had sifted out from the interior. The coastwise craft were hugging the lee of the sandy islet, waiting for the blow to abate; telephone wires were down, and Behring's waters had piled in from the south until they flooded the endless sloughs and tide flats behind Solomon City, destroyed the ferries, and cut us off both east and west, by land and by sea. It were better, I had thought, to wait on the coast for a day or so and watch a chance to dodge to Nome, than to return to the mines; so I had lugged my war bag into Anderson's place, and made formal demand for shelter.

The proprietor apologized as he assigned me a bunk. "It's the best I've got," said he. "I've put you alongside of the stove; so, if the boys snore *too* loud, you can heave coal at 'em. Them big lumps is better than your boots."

I had tried both fuel and foot gear fruitlessly; and, when my outraged ears would not permit of further slumber, I had given up the attempt. Now, while the blue-haired man with insomnia dealt "Idiot's Delight," I sat, vaguely fascinated by the play of his hands, half dozing under the drone of his voice.

The wind rioted without, whipping the sea spray across the sand dunes until it rattled upon our walls like shot. Meanwhile, my companion adventured aimlessly, his strange and vagrant fancies calling for no answer, his odd and morbid journeyings, matching well with the whimpering night. His stories were without beginnings, and they lacked an end. They commenced without reason, led through unfrequented paths, then closed for no cause. Through them ran no thread of relevancy; they were neither cogent nor cohesive; their incidents took shape and tumbled forth irrelated and inconsequent—wherefore I knew them for the truth, and found myself, ere long, wide-eyed and still, my brain as keen as ever nature made it.

The story of the dead Frenchman has seemed strained and grewsome to me since, but that night the storm made it real, and the stranger's unsmiling earnestness robbed it of offense. His words told me a tale of which he had no thought, and painted pictures quite apart from those he had in mind. His very frame of mind, his pagan superstition, his frank, irreverent philosophy, disclosed queer glimpses of this land

where morals are of the fourth dimension, where life is a gamble and death a joke. Whether he really believed all he said or whether he made sport of me, I do not know. It may be that the elfin voices of the storm roused in him an impulse to gratify his distorted sense of humor at my expense—or, at his own.

He began somewhat as follows:

"It's a good night for a dead man to walk." Then, seeing the flicker in my eyes, he ran on: "You don't think they can do it, eh? Well, I didn't believe it, either, and I'm not sure I believe it now; but I've seen queer things—queer things, and I've only got one pair to draw to—either they happened as I saw them, or, I'm crazy." He leaped at his story boldly.

"I'm pretty tired and hungry when I hit Council City, late one fall, for I'd upset my rowboat, lost my outfit, and mushed it one hundred and fifty miles. My whole digestive paraphernalia is in a state of 'innocuous desuetude,' if you know what that is, because all I save from the wreck is a flour sack full of cigarette papers, and a package of chocolate pills about the size of a match head. Each one of these pellets is warranted to contain sufficient nourishment to last the German army for one month—I read it on the label. They may have had it in them, I don't know. I swallow one every morning, and then fill up on reindeer moss till I feel like the leaping pad in a circus.

"Now, when I reach camp I find there ain't any fresh grub to speak of, but I can't get away, so I stick on until spring, see? In time, we begin to have scurvy something terrible. One man out of every five cashes in. I'm living in a cabin with a lot of Frenchmen, and we bury seven from this one shack—seven, that's all! It gets on my nerves, finally. I don't like dead men.

"Now, the last two who fall sick are old man Manard and my pal, young Pete DeFoe. Pete has a ten-dollar gold piece, and Manard owns a dog. Inasmuch as they both know that they can't weather it out till the break-up, Pete bets his ten dollars against the dog that he'll die before Manard.

"Well, this is something new in the sporting line, and we begin to string our bets pretty free. There ain't much excitement going on, so the boys visit the cabin every day, look over the entries, then go outside and make bets. I open up a Paris mutual. The old man is a seven-to-one favorite at the start, because he has all the best of it on form, but the youngster puts up a grand race.

"For three weeks they seesaw back and forth; first one looks like a winner, then the other. It's as pretty running as I ever see. Then Pete lets out a wonderful burst of speed, zings over the last quarter, noses out Manard at the wire, and brings home the money. He dies at three a. m., and wins by four hours.

"I cop eighty-four dollars, six pairs of suspenders, a keg of wire nails, and a frying pan—which constitutes all the circulating medium of the camp. I'm the stakeholder for the late deceased, also; so I find myself the administrator of Manard's dog and the ten dollars that Pete put up.

"Now, seeing that it had been a killing finish, we arrange for a double-barreled burial and a swell funeral. The ground is froze, of course, but we dig two holes through the gravel till we break a pick point, and decide to let it go at that. The Bareheaded Kid is clergyman, because he has a square-cut coat that buttons up the front clean to his chin. There ain't any Bible in camp, so I read some recipes out of a Royal Baking Powder cook book, after which Deaf Mike tries to play 'Taps' on the cornet. But he's held the horn in his mitt during the services, and, the temperature being forty degrees below freezo, when he wets his lips to play they stick to the mouthpiece and crab the hymn. As a whole, it is an enjoyable affair, however, and the best conducted funeral of the winter. Everybody has a good time, though nothing rough.

"Now, I've been friendly to young

Pete DeFoe—him and I bunked together—and the next night he comes to me, saying that he can't rest. I saw him as plain as I see you.

"'What's wrong?' says I. 'Are you cold?'

"'No. The ground is chilly, but it ain't that. Manard, the old hellion, won't let me sleep. He's doing a sand jig on my grave. He says I won that bet crooked and died ahead of time just to get his dog. He's sore on you, too.'

"'What's he sore on me for?' says I.

"'He says he's an old man, and he'd 'a' died first if you hadn't put in with me to double-cross him. He's laying for you,' says Pete.

"Well, I'm pretty sick myself, with a four months' diet of pea soup and oatmeal, and when I wake up I think it's a dream. But the next night Pete is back again, complaining worse than ever. It seems the ghost of old man Manard is still buck-and-winging on Pete's coffin, and he begs me to come down and call the old reprobate off, so that he can get some rest.

"He comes back the third night, and the fourth, and the fifth; and by and by Manard himself comes up to the cabin and begins to abuse me. He says he wants his dog back, but naturally I can't give it to him.

"It gets so that I can't sleep at all, finally. When Pete ain't sitting on my bunk, Manard is calling me names and gritting his teeth at me. I begin to fall off in weight like a jockey. It gets so I have to sit up all night in a chair and make the fellers prod me in the stomach with a stick whenever I doze off. I'll tell you, stranger, it was worse than horrible. I don't know how I made it through till spring.

"Well, in the early summer, I get a letter from the steamboat agent at Nome, saying Manard's people, out in the States, have slipped him some coin, with instructions to send the old man out so they can give him decent burial. He offers me a hundred and fifty to bring him down to the coast. Now, this 'decent burial' talk makes me sore, for I staged the obsequies myself, and they were in perfect form; it was one of the tastiest funerals I ever mixed with. However, I'm broke, so I agree to deliver what is left of Manard at the mouth of the river, and the agent says he'll have a first-class coffin shipped down to the trader at Chinik—our landing. When I deliver Manard, ready for shipment, I get my hundred and fifty.

"I give you my word, I ain't tickled pink with this undertaking. I'm not strong on body-snatching, and I have a hunch that the shade of old Manard is still hanging around somewhere. However, a bird in the hand is the noblest work of God, and I need that roll, so I make ready. It takes me half a day to get drunk enough to want to do the job; and when I get drunk enough to want to do it, I'm so drunk I can't. Then I have to sober up and begin all over again. The minute I get sober enough to do the trick, I realize I ain't drunk enough to stand the strain. I jockey that way for quite a spell, till I finally strike an average, being considerable scared, and reckless to the same extent.

"I remember that we planted the old man in the left-hand grave, but when I get to the graveyard I can't recollect whether I stood at the foot or at the head of the hole during the services—a pint of that mining camp 'hootch' would change the face of any map—so I think I'll make sure.

"I have brought along three tools—a pick, a shovel, and a bottle of rye. The ground is froze, so I use all of them.

"Naturally, I can't afford to get the wrong Frenchman; so I pry up the lid of the first box I uncover, and take a good rubber. Well, sir, it was a shock! Instead of rags and bones like I'm expecting, there is old Manard in statu quo, so to speak. Froze? Maybe so. Anyhow, he grinned at me! That's what I said. He grinned, and I take it on the lam. Understand, I have no intentions of running away. In fact, I don't know I'm doing it until I fetch up back in the saloon. It seems I just balanced my body on my legs, and they did all the work.

"Well, I'm pretty well rattled, so I blot up another pint of pain killer, and finally the bartender goes back with me and helps load Manard into my Peterboro. I'm pretty wet by this time.

"We got the box into the canoe, all right; but it's too big to fit under the seat, so we place the foot of it on the bottom of the boat and rest the other end on a paddle laid across the gunnels.

"This sort of gives Manard the appearance of lounging back on an incline. You see, when I ripped up the boards to take a look, I broke off a piece at a knothole, and that allows him a chance to look out with one eye. He seems to approve of the position, however, so I get in at the stern facing him, and ask if he's ready. He gives me the nod and I shove off. Just for company, I take my grave-digging tools along—that is, all but the pick and the shovel. It was pretty near full when I started, but I lose the cork, and drink it up for safety.

"I don't remember much about the first part of the trip, except that I get awful lonesome. By and by I begin to sing:

"'Oh, the French are in the bay,' said the Shaun Van Vorth.
'The French are in the bay,' said the Shaun Van Vorth.
'The French are in the bay, they'll be here without delay,
But their colors will decay,' said the Shaun Van Vorth.

"I've got a loud voice when I'm sober, but when I'm kippered it's positively insulting. It makes my passenger sore, and he shows it.

"Now, I'm not saying that Manard wasn't as dead as a dried herring. He was past and gone, and he'd made his exit, all right. He'd moved out, and his lease had expired. But I saw that box move! It shifted from side to side. I quit singing. My song fountain ran dry. Says I to myself, 'I neglected to lash you down, Mr. Manard, but you didn't really turn over. It was the motion of the boat.' Then, just to make sure, I break forth into 'Johnny Crapaud,' keeping my eye on the right lens of the old man where it showed through the broken board.

"This time there ain't a doubt of it. He lurched, box and all, clean out of plumb and nearly capsized me. His one lamp blazed! Yes, sir, blazed! I tried to get out of range of it, but it followed me like a search light. I crept forward to cover it up with my coat, but the old frogeater leaned to starboard so far that I had to balance on the port gunnel to keep from going over. We began to spin in the current. Manard sees he has me buffaloed, and it pleases him. He wags his head at me and grins like he did when he came to me in my sleep.

"Well, sir, that eye enthralled me. It destroyed my chain of thought. I felt the chills stealing into my marrow, and that hundred and fifty dollars looked mighty small and insignificant. By and by I begin to figure it out this way. Says I, 'I've outrun him once to-day, and if I can get ashore I'll try it again'; but, when I turn the canoe toward shore, Manard heels over till we take water.

"'Lie still, you blame fool!' says I. 'If you feel that way about it, I'll stay with the ship, of course.'

"I can see the corner of his mouth curl up at that, and he slides back into position. Then I know that he'll let me stick, as long as I don't try to pull out and leave him flat. You really can't blame a corpse much, under the circumstances. However, I can't swim, so I try to square myself. I make conversation of a polite and friendly nature, and the old boy settles back to enjoy himself.

"Well, this one-sided talkfest gets tiresome after a while; I run out of topics, so I tell him funny stories. Sometimes he likes them, and sometimes he most jumps out of the box. Sore? Say, when I pull a wheeze that he don't like, he makes it known quick, and I sit clutching the gunnels, with my hair on end, while he rocks the boat like a demon.

"When I get to the mouth of the river, it's night. I find a stiff breeze blowing, and the bay covered with

whitecaps, so I try to convince Manard that we'd better camp. But I no more than suggest it till I have to bail for dear life. Seeing that he's dead set to keep going, I kiss myself good-by and paddle out across the bay. How we ever make it I don't know, but along about midnight, we blow into Chinik, with me singing songs to my passenger, and cracking 'Joe Millers' that came over in '76. I'm still pretty drunk.

"The trader tells me that the coffin hasn't come from Nome yet, but the steamer is due before morning, so I ask him to cache Manard somewhere and wake me up when the boat comes. Then I go to the hay. I'm tuckered out.

"It seems that the coaster comes in, a few hours later, but the trader is dealing a stud game, and tells the purser to dump his freight on the beach. They do as ordered, then pull out. About daylight the wind shifts, the tide rises and begins to wash the merchandise away. Two rough-necks get busy saving their outfit, when what comes bobbing past on the waves but a handsome zinc-lined casket—the one from Nome!

"'Hey, Bill, cop that box; it'll make a swell bathtub!' says one, so the other pulls up his rubber boots, wades out, and brings it in. The trader, hearing that his goods are in danger, adjourns the game long enough to see about it. He hurries down to the beach, looks over his stuff, then inquires:

"'Where's my coffin?'

"'You ain't got no more coffin than a rabbit,' says one of the miners.

"'Oh, yes, I have—that's it right there.'

"'I guess not. That's *my* coffin. I copped it on the high seas—flotsam and jetsam,' says the rough-neck. 'What's more, I'm going to use it for a cupboard, or a cozy corner. If you want it bad, pay me fifty dollars' salvage, and it's yours.'

"There is some further dispute, till the miner, being a quick-tempered party, reaches for his gat. After the smoke clears away, it is found that he has made an error of judgment, that the storekeeper is gifted as a prophet, and that the 'rough-neck' is ready for his coffin.

"Now, inasmuch as this had been a purely personal affair, and the boys was anxious to reopen the stud game, they exonerated the trader from all blame, complete; and he, being ever anxious to maintain a reputation for fair dealing, and just to show that there ain't no animus behind his action, gives the coffin to the man who had claimed it. What's more, he helps to lay him out with his own hands. Naturally, this is considered conduct handsome enough for any country. In an hour the man is buried and the poker game is open again.

"Did you ever hear how Dawson Sam cut the ears off of a bank dealer?" asked the narrator suddenly.

"Hold on!" said I. "What's the rest of this story? What became of Manard?"

"Oh, he's there yet, for all I know," said the stranger, as he shuffled the cards. "His folks wouldn't send no more money, the steamboat agent at Nome had done his share, and the trader at Chinik said he wasn't responsible."

"And you? Didn't you get your hundred and fifty dollars?"

"No. You see, it was a C. O. D. shipment. I wake up along about noon, put my head under the pump, and then look up the trader. He is still playing stud."

"'Where's my casket?' says I. 'I've got my dead man, but I don't collect on him till he's crated and f.o.b.' The trader has an ace in the hole, and two kings in sight, so he says, over his shoulder:

"'I'm sorry, old man; but while you was asleep a tenderfoot jumped your coffin.' Now, this Dawson Sam has a crooked bank dealer named——"

"I think I'll go back to bed," said I.

The Red House on Rowan Street

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Henry Burton visits the Underwood family to induce Miss Leslie Underwood to reconsider her refusal to marry Philip Overman, the son of a dear friend of Burton's. He finds the town arrayed against Doctor Underwood and his son, Henry, because of a series of mysterious pranks and depredations, culminating in the highway robbery of Orton Selby, a contractor with a violent grudge against Henry, laid to their door in anonymous handbills. The doctor invites a committee of investigation. On the day of Burton's arrival, Doctor Underwood sprains his ankle. Burton assists him, and learns of the annoyances to which the family has been subjected. He finds damaging evidence, which has been concealed in the doctor's study where it could be easily discovered. He convinces all the committee of the flaw in that sort of evidence except Orton Selby, who vows he will convict the doctor. Burton lies in wait, that night, in the hopes of detecting the person who "planted" the evidence. He sees Henry come in at an early hour in the morning. When he wakes, he finds an anonymous warning bidding him to leave. When he shows this to the doctor, the latter recognizes it as an attempt to imitate his own handwriting. Burton suspects Henry, when the servant tells that during the night the house of the Sprigg children, who were responsible for the doctor's accident, was burned to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BABY THAT WAS TIED IN.

IT was nearing noon when Burton left Doctor Underwood's. He took the street that led by the Spriggs' house, though it led him somewhat out of the most direct road to the hotel. He wanted to get the temper of the crowd and the gossip of the street. But the crowd had dispersed.

He saw one man near the blackened wall of the house, where the fire was supposed to have started. He was bending down, as though examining the ground. Then he arose and went away—somewhat hurriedly and furtively, Burton thought. It was, indeed, this skulking quality in the man's hasty departure that made Burton look at him a second time. It was Selby. So! He was apparently hunting for the "proof" that he had promised. But why should he be so secretive about it?

As Burton came around by the other side of the burned house, he saw that two boys were still lingering on the scene of the morning's excitement. They were talking vigorously; and when Burton stopped by the fence and looked in, one of the boys, recognizing a kindred interest in the drama of life, called to him:

"Did yer see the bush where the kid was found?"

"What kid?" asked Burton.

"The Spriggses baby. He was right in here among the lilac bushes, and the soft little shoots had been tied together around him, so's he couldn't get away, like Moses an' the bulrushes. Right in here. Yer can see the place now."

Burton jumped the fence, and went up to the place where the boys were.

"Was the baby lost?" he asked.

"Mrs. Spriggs thought it was all burned up, because she forgot it when she came down in a hurry, and she was carrying on just awful; and then

This story began in the issue of December 15, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents.

the firemen found the baby in here among the bushes, and they most stepped on it before they saw it."

"Had it crawled in by itself?"

"Naw—it was *tied* in! See here. You can see the knots yet, only most of them have been pulled to pieces."

"Who tied it in?" pressed Burton, bending down to examine the knots. They certainly were peculiar. The lithe lilac twigs had been drawn together by a cord that ran in and out among them until they were twisted and woven together as though they were part of a basket. It was the knot of an experienced and skillful weaver.

"Mrs. Spriggs she says 'at Henry Underwood would be too durn mean to look out for the kid, and she thinks it was sperrits. But if it was sperrits they could 'a' took the baby clear over to some house, couldn't they? The branches was tied together so's they had to cut some of them to get the kid out. See, you can see here where they cut 'em."

Burton found that the theory advanced by the boys—to the effect that the incendiary who had fired the house had also, in dramatic fashion, saved the life of the youngest of the Spriggs brood, by carrying the infant down from the second floor and knotting the lilac shoots about it so that it could not crawl into danger—was the most popular by-product of the fire. The story was in every one's mouth.

When he entered the dining room at the hotel, he encountered Ralston.

"Hello!" said the newspaper man. "I saw that you were registered here. Allow me to welcome you to the only home a bachelor like myself owns. Won't you sit at my table, to give the fiction some verisimilitude?"

"Thank you. I shall be glad to."

"You will suspect that my wholehearted hospitality has some professional substratum if I ask you at once how our friends the Underwoods are, but I'll have to risk that. I assume that you have seen them to-day."

"Yes, I have seen the doctor and Miss Underwood. They have met the amazing charge against Henry with dignity and patience. I didn't see Henry, and don't know what he may have to say."

"He'd better say nothing," said Ralston tersely. "It isn't a matter that is bettered by talk."

"Do you think there will be anything more than talk? I have, as yet, heard no suggestion of the slightest evidence against him."

"No. So far, it is merely his bad reputation and the doctor's threat of yesterday. Have you happened to hear of the lively times Henry gave the town, some six years ago? Property was burnt, things were stolen, people were terrorized in all sorts of ways for an entire summer. He must have had a glorious time."

"Was it proved against him?" asked Burton.

"The police never actually caught him, but they came so close upon his tracks several times that they warned the doctor that they had evidence against him. Then the disturbances stopped. That was significant."

"I heard something about it; but I understood that the attacks were mostly directed against the Underwoods themselves, and that the anonymous letters written by the miscreant were particularly directed against Henry. You don't suspect him of accusing himself!"

"But that's what he did. In fact, that was what first set the police to watching him. Perhaps you haven't happened to hear of such things, but there is a morbid form of egotism that makes people accuse themselves of crimes just for the sake of the notoriety. The handwriting of those letters was disguised, but the police were satisfied that Henry wrote them. They watched him for weeks; and though, as I say, they never caught him at anything really incriminating, they came so close on his trail several times that he evidently got scared and quit. Watson, the chief of police here, told me about it afterward, and he is not sensational. Quite the contrary."

"How old was Henry at that time?"

"About nineteen."

"No wonder that he has grown into

a morose man," said Burton thoughtfully. "It would be hard for any one to keep sweet-tempered against the pressure of such a public opinion."

Ralston shrugged his shoulders. "Public opinion is a brute beast, I admit; but, still, Henry has teased it more than was prudent. However, he has his picturesque sides. Did you hear about the rescue of the Spriggs baby?"

"Being knotted in among the lilac bushes for safe-keeping? Yes, I have even seen the bushes."

"He probably knew that the others would be able to escape, and so looked after the only helpless one—which seems to have been more than the baby's mother did. That should count in his favor with a jury."

"Well, they certainly can't bring him to trial unless they get more evidence against him than they have at present," said Burton.

Ralston's reply was interrupted by a telephone call. He went to the office to answer it, and when he returned his face was grave.

"It looks as though they really had got something like direct evidence at last," he said. "They have found Henry Underwood's knife under the window where the incendiary must have got in."

"Who found it?"

"A couple of schoolboys. They turned it over to the police. One of my men has just got the story."

"Is it beyond question that it is Henry's?"

"Selby has identified it as the same knife that Henry had last night when we were there. He was in the neighborhood, it seems, and recognized the knife, which the boys showed him on finding it. You remember that Selby had Henry's knife in his hands last night, and broke the point of the blade."

"Yes, I remember," said Burton. He was also recalling something else—a skulking figure slipping away from the spot where the knife was found a very little later. "Doesn't it seem curious that the knife was only discovered now, considering how many people have been back and forth over the place all forenoon?"

"The knife seems to have been trodden into the earth by the crowd. That's how it was not found sooner."

"It seems to be a case of 'Carthage must be destroyed,'" said Burton, with some impatience. "Selby vowed, this morning, that he would find evidence against Henry. He is conveniently at hand to identify as Henry's a knife which he had in his own hands last night. It wouldn't require very much imagination to see a connection there. Selby hates Henry. Selby uses Henry's knife, and in the passion of the moment slips it forgetfully into his own pocket. Then, at the right time, he loses it at a place where its discovery will seem to implicate Henry in a crime——"

"S-s-sh!" warned Ralston, with a look of comic dismay.

But the warning came too late. Burton, startled, looked up in some anxiety, and found Selby just back of him, glaring at him with a look that was like a blow from a bludgeon. There was nothing less than murder in his eye. But, instead of speaking, he turned on his heel as Burton half arose, and walked out of the room.

"I had no idea that there was any one within earshot," said Burton, with dismay in his face.

"He just came in by that door back of you. I had no time to warn you."

"I'm a poor conspirator. Must I hunt Mr. Selby up, and apologize for the liveliness of my imagination?"

Ralston looked grave. "You must do as you please, but I'd let the cards lie as they fell. Selby has a violent temper——"

"He certainly looked murderous."

"I can't understand why he walked off without saying anything. I should have expected him to do something violent. I saw him beat a horse nearly to death, once, because he was in a rage——"

"That settles it. I shall not apologize. I'm glad he heard me."

Ralston laughed. "I'm glad you came

to High Ridge! Do stay. We may be able to afford you some entertainment. You should hear Hadley! He is terrified to death for fear something will happen to him next, because he rashly made the remark that we are not safe in our beds so long as the Underwoods are loose."

"What does he expect to happen?"

"Goodness knows!" Then, with a mischievous look, he added: "Henry Underwood's methods are always original! It will probably be a surprise."

Once more, to speak figuratively, Burton threw his time-table into the waste basket. He certainly could not leave High Ridge while things were in this chaotic condition. He must at least wait until something definite happened.

He did not have long to wait.

CHAPTER IX.

A POINTED WARNING.

Burton did not know exactly what he expected to happen, or what he would gain by staying; but something more than a sense of his responsibility to Rachel made him want to see the thing through. That suspicion should have buzzed so long about Henry Underwood, and nothing yet be proved, could only be due to a combination of luck and circumstances which could not be expected to continue indefinitely. With Selby hot on the trail, the police were likely to have some effective assistance. Malevolence is a great sharpener of the wits.

Wouldn't it be possible to get Henry out of town? Had he gone far enough in his hint to the doctor? Possibly, if he saw Henry alone, he could convey a warning that would be understood. He determined to see Henry.

But Henry was not at home. Burton's disappointment at this information might have been greater, had it not been conveyed by Miss Underwood. He found it very easy to extend his inquiry into a call, and when he finally arose to take his leave he was surprised to find how time had flown.

Philip was justified. The only thing to wonder at was Philip's discrimination. He must have been caught merely by her beauty, but even to appreciate her beauty at its right value was more than he had given Philip credit for. But what was the outcome to be? If the family was involved in a scandal, Philip was not the man to stand by her. He would be dominated by Rachel's prejudices, and Rachel would think the whole thing simply unspeakable.

Yet, things had gone so far that it would be impossible for Philip to withdraw without humiliating the girl—and that, Burton now saw clearly, was the one impossible and unspeakable thing. No; the only way out was to stop the scandal from going farther. Henry must be suppressed.

He had been revolving these thoughts as he walked the streets back to the hotel, when all at once his eye was caught by the sign:

ORTON SELBY
Contractor and Builder

It swung above the door of a prosperous-looking place, and he looked at the premises with interest. So this was where Mr. Selby did business!

As he looked, Mrs. Bussey came out of the office door, and scuttled off down the street, like a frightened animal finding itself out of bounds. Possibly she was bringing some of her crippled son's carving to his employer. The connection was obvious, and the relation was well understood; but, somehow, Burton did not like the idea of an inmate of the Underwood house having this side relation with a man who was an enemy. If anything was to be done to save Henry, it must be done skillfully and promptly. The atmosphere of the place was not favorable.

"There's a letter for you," the hotel clerk said, as he handed Burton his key.

Burton took it with some wonder. He was not expecting mail here. But this letter had never gone through the mails. It was unstamped. The envel-

ope was addressed in a heavy, blunt penciling that he had seen before.

"Who left this?" he asked.

"I found it on the desk. I didn't see who left it there," the clerk said.

Burton did not open it until he reached his room. Then his premonition was confirmed. The scrap of paper was covered with the same heavy-lined writing that had been on the warning paper he had found in the morning. The message read:

> You have had one warning. This is the second. The third will be the last. You may as well understand that your help is not wanted.

And the clerk did not know how it came on his desk! There seemed to be a very conspiracy of stupidity and malice in the place. He examined it carefully. It was addressed to him by his full name—and his circle of acquaintances in High Ridge was extremely limited. Henry had not been at the Red House when he called there. The letter had been left by some one who could come into the hotel and go out without exciting comment—clearly a familiar figure in the town.

Burton's lips curled cynically. The meaning of the message was quite plain. His "help" was not wanted. Whom was he trying to help, except the Underwoods?

He put the letter, envelope and all, into a large envelope, which he sealed and directed to himself. He did not wish to destroy it just yet, neither did he wish to leave it where it would fall under another eye.

He dined in the public dining room, without seeing either Ralston or Selby; and, being in no mood to cultivate new acquaintances, returned at once to his own room. He lit a cigar, got a book from his bag, and settled down to read himself into quietness; but his mind would not free itself from the curious situation in which he found himself, and presently he tossed the book aside, and went to the table where he had left the sealed letter addressed to himself.

It was gone! It had been abstracted from his locked room while he was down at dinner!

Suddenly, as he stood there thinking, there was a sharp "ping," and a pane of his window crashed into splinters and fell into the room. A thud near his head caused him to turn—and there, in the wall, was a small hole, where a bullet had buried itself in the plaster! The third warning!

Burton went down the stairs two steps at a time, and out into the street. The hotel was on the main street, and his room—on the second floor—looked toward the front. Across the street from the hotel was a small park, full of trees and shadows. It was clear that the shot through his front window had come from the direction of this park, and also that it would be futile to try to discover any one who might have been in hiding there. There were a hundred avenues of unseen escape. It was already dark enough to make the streets obscure.

Burton went in and reported the shooting to the clerk. Of the missing letter he said nothing.

"Some boys must have been fooling around in the park with a gun," said the clerk, after viewing the scene of the disaster. "They might have hit you, the idiots! I'll bet they are scared stiff by now, and serve them right."

"I wish you'd give me another room," said Burton abruptly.

"Why? You don't think they'll try to pot you again, do you?" smiled the clerk.

"I prefer to take another room," said Burton stiffly.

"Oh, very well. The adjoining room is vacant, if that will suit you."

"Yes. You may have my things moved in. Or—hold on! I'll move them in now, with your assistance, and you needn't say anything about the change downstairs."

The clerk took some pains to make it evident that he was suppressing a smile, but Burton did not care particularly what opinion the young man might form of his courage. He had other things in view.

His new room looked toward the side

of the hotel. A driveway ran below his windows, separating the hotel from a large private house adjoining. Burton took a careful survey of his location, and, when he settled down again to read, he was careful to select a position which was not in range with the windows.

He was beginning to take the High Ridge mystery seriously.

CHAPTER X.

MR. HADLEY, PROPHET.

Burton had reason to congratulate himself on having formed a clear idea of the location of his new room, for he had occasion to use that knowledge in a hurry.

He had dropped into an early and heavy sleep, to make up for his wakeful adventures of the night before, when he was awakened by a succession of screams that seemed to fill the room with vibrating terror. He was on his feet and into his clothes in less time than it would have taken the average man to wake up.

While he was dressing, another shriek showed that the sounds came from the house which he had noticed across the driveway. He dropped at once from his window to the roof of a bay window below, and thence to the ground. It was a woman shrieking. That was all he knew.

He stumbled across the driveway, and found his way to the front door of the house. It was locked. Even while he was trying it, a man from the street dashed up the steps, and ran along the porch to a side window, which he threw up.

"Lucky you thought of that," cried Burton, running to the spot. On the instant, he recognized Henry Underwood. "For Heaven's sake, if there is trouble here, keep away!" he continued impetuously, forgetting everything except that this was Leslie's brother.

But Henry had jumped in through the open window without answering; and, naturally, Burton followed. Together they sprang up the stairway, their path made plain by the low-turned light in the upper hall.

At the head of the stairs, a girl stood, screaming in the mechanical, terrified way that he had heard. At sight of Henry, who was in the lead, she shrieked and cowered.

"What is the matter?" demanded Burton. And when she did not answer immediately, he added impatiently: "Tell me at once what frightened you."

She pointed to an open bedroom door, and Burton sprang toward it. It was a curious sight that met his eye.

In a large, old-fashioned four-poster a man was lying, gagged and bound—and not only bound, but trussed and wound about with heavy cord until he looked like a cocoon, or an enlarged Indian papoose, ready to be swung from a drooping branch. His eyes rolled toward Burton with an expression that would have been ludicrous if the whole situation had not been so serious.

Burton removed the gag, first of all, and tried to help the man to sit up; but he was so bound to the framework of the bed that nothing could be done until the cord was cut. While he was still struggling with the cord, other people began to come rushing in—servants from the house, and men from the street or the hotel, attracted, as Burton had been, by the girl's cries; also a stray policeman. Their exclamations and questions, rather than any recognition on his own part, told him that this absurdly undignified figure, almost too terrified to talk, was none other than his pompous friend, Mr. Hadley.

By their united efforts, the cord was soon cut, and Mr. Hadley was lifted to a sitting position.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Hadley?" some one asked.

He only groaned reproachfully in reply.

Burton had, for the moment, forgotten about Henry. Now, he glanced anxiously about the room, which already seemed crowded. Henry was not to be seen, and Burton drew a breath of relief. Thank Heaven, he had cleared out!

Ralston had been one of the first

to arrive on the scene, and his practical questions soon brought order out of the confusion.

"Now, Mr. Hadley—you must pull yourself together and give us all the information you can, at once, so that we can take steps to discover who did this, before he gets beyond reach. Did some one enter your bedroom?"

"Yes. Oh, Lord, yes!"

"Did you see him come in?"

"I was asleep. Then I felt some one touching me, and tried to sit up. I couldn't move. I tried to call out, but my jaw was tied up with that horrible cloth. I couldn't see, because the handkerchief was tied over my eyes."

"Didn't you see him at all? Can you give no description?"

"How could I see, with my eyes tied up?"

"Did he say anything?"

"No, but he laughed horribly under his breath, in a kind of devilish enjoyment. It made my blood run cold. I thought he was going to kill me next. Oh, Lord!"

"How did he get out—by the window, or by the door?"

"I don't know. It was quiet, and I waited for what was going to happen next—and waited, and waited—and it got to be more and more horrible, until I thought I should die before some one came."

"He came in by the window," said a man in the crowd, who had been examining the room. "See, here are the marks of mud on the window sill. He must have pulled himself up by the vine trellis. See how it is torn loose, here."

"Was the window open when you went to bed, Mr. Hadley?"

"Yes. Oh, Lord, that such things should be allowed to happen!"

"Who was it gave the alarm? You, Miss Hadley? How did you discover what had happened to your father?"

The young woman whom Burton had seen in the hall had come into the room. She was holding fast to the bedpost, and staring at her father, with a look of fascinated horror.

"I felt the wind blowing through the hall," she said. "I came out to see where it came from."

"Had you been asleep?"

"N-no." She was fully dressed, Burton noticed.

"Had you been in your room long?" Ralston persisted.

"N—yes." She hesitated, with an involuntary glance at her father. "A-all evening."

"And you heard no noise of any one entering the house or leaving it?"

"No."

"Where did the wind come from? Was there a door open?"

"No; it came from father's room. It was blowing so hard that I thought I ought to shut his window; so I went in, and then I found him all strapped in bed."

"Yes; and she just began to scream, and never thought of cutting the cord," grumbled Hadley.

"Was there a light in the room?" Ralston pressed his questions.

"Yes; the gas was lit."

"Well, it seems perfectly clear that some one has climbed up by the vine to the open window, entered while you were asleep, lit the gas—after first bandaging your eyes, so that you could not see—and then, after tying you up, made his escape in the same way. Now, let's see if we can get any clue as to his identity. Of course, it was no burglar. A burglar doesn't indulge in fancy work of this sort. There must have been personal enmity back of it. Did he leave anything in the room?"

Burton had been standing by the fireplace, listening. His eye had already caught sight of a folded paper, on the mantel, which had a curiously familiar look. Surely he had no interest in preventing the truth from being known; yet, he was on the point of moving nearer and getting quiet possession of the paper, when some one else noticed it and picked it up.

"Here's a message from him!" shouted the man who had found it, and then read aloud:

If you keep on accusing me and slandering me in public, worse things will happen to you next. DOCTOR UNDERWOOD.

"I knew it was Doctor Underwood!" gasped Hadley. "Oh, Lord, I knew he would get even with me for saying that we would not be safe in our beds. I didn't mean it. I always knew I was perfectly safe in my bed."

Ralston came quickly over, and took the paper from the hand of the man who had read it. As he did so, he glanced at Burton, as though recognizing that he was the one man here who might be expected to speak for Doctor Underwood.

"Where was it?"

"Right here, on the mantel."

Ralston handed it over to Burton, asking, in an undertone: "What do you make of it?"

Burton took the paper and examined it, but merely shook his head, to escape answering. It did not need a glass to show him that it was written on the typewriter which had produced the other documents he had examined.

"But it is signed, isn't it?" exclaimed Hadley. "It says Doctor Underwood."

"Of course it is perfectly clear, in the first place, that Doctor Underwood did *not* write it, since he would not leave a public confession behind him, and he would not sign his name in that fashion. It is written by some one who wanted to throw suspicion on Doctor Underwood, and who was ignorant enough to think it could be done in this very clumsy way," said Burton.

Some one in the room gave an unpleasant laugh. Selby, who had been standing in the background near Miss Hadley, now spoke up.

"If it wasn't Doctor Underwood himself, I guess it was some one not so very far from him."

"What do you mean?"

"Henry Underwood was in the hall when I came in. He kept out of sight, but he was there. He stayed until Proctor read that paper aloud. He isn't here now, is he?"

There was a sensation in the room. No one else had seen him, but no one but Selby had stood where he could look into the dimly lit hall.

"Well, what of it?" said Burton impatiently, though he himself had wondered what had become of Henry. "It seems to me that the name of Underwood sets you all off. If Henry Underwood chose to go home when he found his assistance was not needed, that surely is not, in itself, a suspicious circumstance. He probably knew that his presence, if noticed, would be made the subject of vilification in some way."

Selby sneered, but he exercised the unusual self-control of saying nothing.

The man who had picked up the note on the mantel had been examining the cord with which Hadley had been bound, and which Burton had cut. He now stood up and faced the little company, with a seriousness of aspect that was more impressive than any voluble excitement could have been.

"I sold Henry Underwood that cord, yesterday," he said. His tone and look made it seem like an affidavit.

"You are sure of it, Mr. Proctor?" asked Ralston.

"Quite sure. It is a peculiar cord. I got it in a general invoice about two years ago, and it has been lying in a drawer in the store ever since—there has never been any call for anything of that sort. Yesterday Henry Underwood was in, and asked for some light rope that would be strong enough to bear a man's weight; and I remembered this ball, and brought it out. I have never seen another piece of cord like it. It isn't likely that there is another piece in town of that same unusual make."

The men pressed about the bed to examine the cut cord—all except Selby, who crossed the room to where Miss Hadley had sunk into a chair. She still had a dazed look, and, though Selby talked to her for some time in an earnest undertone, Burton could not see that she made any response. Selby caught Burton's eye upon them, and scowled, but went on with his murmured speech.

"If you will make the charge against Henry Underwood, I will take him into custody," said the police officer who was in the room.

"Oh, Lord! What will happen to me if I do?" gasped Hadley.

"Well, if he is in jail, I guess nothing more will happen to you," said the officer dryly.

"But, Doctor Underwood——"

"If Henry Underwood is at the bottom of all these tricks, then Doctor Underwood isn't," said Ralston quickly. "We all know that the doctor and Henry are not on very good terms. Just what the trouble is between them, or how deep it goes, we don't know; but it may be that Henry is bitter enough against his father to try to turn suspicion against him in this way. And if he did this, he did the other things. They all hang together. What do you think, Mr. Burton?"

"I agree with you that they all seem to hang together."

"But not that Henry would seem to be the responsible person?"

"As to that, I am hardly in a position to express an opinion," said Burton quickly. He had been examining the curiously knotted cord that had been wound about the unfortunate Mr. Hadley.

The knots, rather than the cord itself, were what attracted his attention. They were peculiarly intricate—the knots of a practiced weaver. What was more, they had the same peculiar twist that the woven withes of lilac had had. Probably it was a knot familiar to sailors and weavers; but certainly not one man in a thousand could make it so neatly, so deftly, so exactly. The police were certainly incredibly stupid not to take note of so peculiar and so distinguishing a mark, but at this moment it was not his rôle to offer any suggestions.

"Do you wish me to arrest Henry Underwood?" asked the policeman. "It's up to you to say, Mr. Hadley."

"You won't tell him that I accused him?"

"I won't tell him anything! I only want to know if you think that there is a reasonable guess that he did this night's work. If you will say that, I'll arrest him on suspicion. I don't want to get myself into trouble by arresting a man, if you are going to back down afterward and say you have no charge to bring against him."

"I'll bring the charge, if Mr. Hadley won't!" said Selby sharply. "I demand his arrest."

"That's enough," said the policeman, slipping quietly from the room.

Burton was at his heels. "If you don't mind, I'll go out with you."

"And if I do mind?"

"I'll go anyhow."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARREST.

Burton's policeman picked up two other men on the way, and, thus reënforced, they made their way to Rowan Street. It was away past midnight, and, as they went through the silent streets, Burton had a queer feeling that he was taking part in some strange melodrama in an alien world. Never before had he come into direct personal contact with the world where policemen were important people, and the primitive affairs that he had supposed to represent the dregs of human nature were matters of everyday occurrence. Why hadn't Henry Underwood had sense enough to be satisfied with his narrow escape of the night before?

There was a light burning in the surgery as they approached the house—a fact to which Higgins, the first policeman, called attention.

"That light sometimes burns all night," he said, pursing up his lips.

"Any city ordinance against it?" asked Burton.

Higgins looked up, with a slow question in his eyes. "You will stay with me, Mr. Burton," he said quietly. "O'Meara and Hanna, you go to rear of house and see that he doesn't make a getaway."

He rang the bell at the front door, and stepped instantly back, so that he could keep an eye on the whole front of the house.

In a minute the door was opened wide, and Doctor Underwood, in a dressing gown, stood there, peering out

into the dark. "Who wants me?" he asked.

Higgins stepped quickly inside and, as soon as Burton, who followed in his wake, had entered, he closed the front door, turned the key, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Excuse me," he said, in a brisk undertone. "No one wants you, doctor. I want Mr. Henry Underwood."

"*You* want him, Higgins? What for?"

"Assault."

"Assault! Henry? You're crazy! Henry hasn't spirit enough to assault any one. I'd bail him out with the greatest joy in the world, if he did. Whom did he assault, in the name of Goshen?"

"Mr. Hadley."

"Hadley! Well—there may be something to the boy, after all. When did this happen?"

"Just now—to-night. I don't want any trouble, but I don't want any foolishness, either. I've got to arrest him, you know, doctor. It ain't what I may choose to do about it. So, will you take me up to his room at once, before he hears me, or takes an alarm?"

"You always were an unfortunate man, Higgins; but it is mighty hard luck that you should have to show the whole community what an idiot you are. It is kind of hard to be made a fool of in such a public way. Henry is abed and asleep, and has been, for hours."

"Then I'll have to wake him, and, if you'll excuse me, doctor, I can't let you give him any more time by this palaver. Will you take me to his room, or shall I hunt for it myself?"

Underwood glanced at Burton, and wrinkled his face into an unbetraying mask; but, as he led the way upstairs, he walked more slowly and draggingly than he had walked in the afternoon, and Burton's heart ached for him.

"That's his room," he said, pointing to a closed door. The gleam of light along the lower edge showed plainly that the occupant was still up.

Higgins went to the door with catlike silence and swiftness, and laid his hand on the knob. It turned without resistance, and he burst in upon Henry Underwood, who was half undressed. The bed had not been disturbed. The scattered clothing on the chairs showed that he had just come in from outdoors.

"What does this mean?" demanded Henry, with a look of amazement.

"You are under arrest," said Higgins. "Don't try any tricks. My men are about the house."

"What am I arrested for?"

"For assault on Mr. Hadley. And I warn you that anything you may say will be used against you."

"This is all foolishness, you know," said Henry; but his voice was spiritless and unconvincing, and Doctor Underwood groaned involuntarily.

"I haven't anything to do with that. All I have to do is to carry out orders. And I'll have to ask you to change your shoes. No, you don't!" He sprang forward and caught Henry roughly as the latter, at the word, rubbed his muddy shoe upon the rug on which he was standing. "We want your shoes, fresh mud and all. Just take them off, will you?"

"Take them off yourself!" growled Henry, with a black look.

Higgins whistled, and the two other men answered, one by melodramatically dropping in through the open window, and the other by appearing at the door. "Take off his shoes—carefully, mind you. We want that mud on them. And get another pair for him, if you can find them."

He motioned to Henry to sit down; but, instead of dropping obligingly into the nearest chair, Henry stalked indignantly across the room, and threw himself down on an upholstered lounge. Then he thrust out both feet before him, with an arrogant air; and the two policemen, who had followed him closely, dropped on their knees and unfastened and removed his shoes.

Higgins, who was proud of himself for thinking of a detail which might prove important, watched the process so closely that he paid no attention to anything else. Underwood, who leaned

heavily against the door casing, watched his son's face with a look that was something like despair. But Burton, who stood silently at one side, watched Henry, and so saw an apparently casual motion that took his right hand from the vicinity of his breast pocket to the inner edge of the upholstered seat of the lounge.

"Well, what next?" Henry asked brusquely, when the men had shod him.

"You will come with us," said Higgins.

He arose, without a word, and reached for his hat and coat.

"Henry!" The word broke from Doctor Underwood like a cry. "Have you anything to say to me?"

Henry gave him one look, and then dropped his eyelids.

"I think not," he said, with a curious air of deliberation.

"I'll come and see you to-morrow, my boy."

Henry nodded carelessly, and turned to Higgins.

"I'm ready," he said briefly.

"One moment," said Burton. "How is your cut finger? I think I'd better look at it before you go." Without waiting for permission, he took Henry's hand and examined the forefinger, which had been cut the evening before. Henry had dressed it carelessly with court-plaster, but it was evident that the finger was both stiff and sore.

But Henry was far from being a model patient. He pulled his hand away, with a look of surprise and resentment, at Burton's touch. "That's nothing!" he said impatiently. "What are you waiting for, Higgins?"

"You," replied Higgins succinctly, slipping his hand under Henry's elbow.

Doctor Underwood followed the little procession downstairs, and did not notice that Burton lingered for a moment in the room. The friend of the family lingered, without moving, until Henry was out of eyeshot, and then jumped to the sofa and ran his long fingers between the upholstered back and the seat. It did not take more than a minute to satisfy his quest. Then he hurried downstairs, where he found a forlorn group.

Mrs. Underwood, tragically calm, sat, like a classic statue of despair, in a large armchair, while the doctor, who had evidently been explaining the situation to his family, limped painfully and restlessly about the room. Leslie, erect, and with hands clinched and head thrown back, followed him with her eyes.

"I think Henry is insane," she said deliberately.

Doctor Underwood glanced apprehensively at Burton, who appeared, at that moment, in the doorway. Then he dropped into a chair, with a groan. "I forgot my confounded ankle," he said, in lame explanation.

Mrs. Underwood turned her gaze slowly upon him. "Don't prevaricate, Roger," she said coldly. "You did not groan because of your ankle, but because Henry's sin has found him out. I should think you would at least see the importance of keeping clear of future sin."

"May I come in?" asked Burton. There was something strange in his voice—a quality that made every one turn toward him expectantly, as though he brought a message. "May I venture a word? Of course, you know that I know what has happened. I came here with the officer, because I felt that my interest in everything touching the honor of your family warranted me in seeing this unfortunate affair through as far as possible. I say unfortunate because, of course, it must add to your annoyance—temporarily. But I do not think it will do more than that. In fact, I think it may be the means of really getting at the truth that lies under this mass of misunderstanding. I do not think that Henry Underwood is insane—or that he had anything to do with Mr. Hadley's plight. I believe him innocent and honorable, and I am going to bend every energy I possess to proving him so."

He had spoken to all, but his eyes rested eagerly on Leslie.

At his last words, she sprang impulsively forward, and caught his hand

in both her own. "Oh, thank you—thank you!" she cried.

"Leslie, control yourself," said Mrs. Underwood, in calm reproof.

Doctor Underwood got upon his feet, with entire disregard of his ankle, and crossed the room to Burton.

"Have you any ground for that opinion, beyond an optimistic disposition and a natural desire to spare the family of your patient?" he demanded. "God knows I want to believe you—but——" He broke off, and shook his head.

Burton hastily realized that he was hardly justified, at this point, in making public his own grounds for assurance.

"Well—his cut finger is sufficient. He couldn't tie all the knots that bound Hadley with that stiff finger," he said, with a would-be astute air.

Underwood could not conceal his disappointment. "You have nothing definite, then, to go upon?"

"Perhaps my evidence, in the present stage, would not be conclusive in court. But that is what I hope to make it. That is what I am definitely undertaking to do. And I believe I shall succeed." He smiled at Leslie, and, though she did not repeat her impulsive demonstration of gratitude, he was satisfied with the look in her eyes.

On his way back to the hotel, he suddenly stopped under the trees and spoke to himself impatiently. What difference did it make to him what sort of look there was in the eyes of Philip's betrothed? He would be better employed in considering the situation of the Underwoods, in the light of this new revelation about the silent Henry. If Henry were in love with Miss Hadley—and why else should he carry a locket with her portrait in his breast pocket, and think first of all of concealing this trinket, when threatened with arrest and fearing a search?—then there was a reasonable explanation of his prowling in the neighborhood of the Hadley house.

Burton had thrust the locket back into its hiding place in the upholstered lounge, but he could not be mistaken. It was the same face that he had seen looking up at Selby—— Hello! No need to hunt farther for an explanation of the antagonism between the two men! The look on Selby's face when he talked so earnestly to Miss Hadley was one of the few human expressions that can neither be concealed nor counterfeited. And since nothing could be more reckless, more hopeless, more bitter than love between the daughter of the pompous banker and the scapegoat of the town—why, of course, that was the mine that Cupid would fire.

But, if Henry were innocent, who was the man who was so bent on making him appear guilty? Who really was behind the High Ridge mystery? The problem was not solved. It was merely made more complicated. And Burton had to acknowledge that his guess was not evidence that would convince the public. Indeed, now that he was half an hour away from it, he began to wonder at his own confidence. It had come to him like a revelation, but it needed verification.

Very well, he said doggedly, he *would* verify a part of it, at once. He would call on Miss Hadley to-morrow.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNSTABLE SWEETHEART.

Burton awoke the next morning in a new frame of mind. His half-reluctant interest in the Underwood situation had suddenly been touched with enthusiasm. If Henry were innocent, then the whole thing was a hideous conspiracy that cried to Heaven to be exposed. The fact that it was not taking place in past historic times or in distant lands, but here in a commonplace town of the Middle West, in the light of newspapers, police regulations, and prevalent respectability—this made it more interesting to him, instead of more prosaic. It was a real and vital situation, not merely an imaginable possibility.

If Henry were, in truth, innocent; if the doctor were the guileless child of light that he seemed; if Miss Leslie had been involved in all this tangle by a cruel trick of fate—then, certainly,

here was work waiting for him. He was no detective, but neither was this the ordinary melodrama of crime. It was rather a psychological problem; and it was just possible that he was better fitted to get at the truth of the matter than a professional, who would have less human interest in the persons involved.

First of all, he would see Miss Hadley. He wanted to verify his guess that Henry's presence in the neighborhood last night was something that she could very well explain, if she wanted to. And if that proved true, then Henry's wanderings on the night of the fire might easily have been in the same direction. Burton could not deny that it would ease his mind to have that point settled.

Miss Hadley came into the reception room with a nervous flutter in her manner and a startled look in her soft eyes. She was a pretty girl, of an excessively feminine type—all soft coloring and timid grace. Certainly she was a pleasant thing to look upon, yet Burton's heart rather sank as he stood up to meet her.

"She hasn't the backbone to stand by a man," he thought to himself, with a swift recognition of what Henry was going to need. But aloud he said: "I took the liberty of calling to inquire about your father. I hope that his trying experiences last night have not had any serious effects."

"He has gone down to the bank," she answered. "He felt that he ought to take the risk."

"Risk! What is he afraid of?"

"Why, anything might happen, after last night," she said, opening her eyes wide upon him.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Burton quickly, "because it indicates that you—and, I hope, your father—do not share the foolish idea that Henry Underwood was in any way responsible for that outrage."

Her eyes filled with quick tears at the name. "They say he did it," she murmured.

"But you don't believe that," he said reassuringly. "You know that he has been arrested and put in jail, yet you say that your father fears other possible attacks. Of course, if Mr. Underwood was the one, there would be no further danger, now that he is locked up. So, I infer that your father is satisfied that it was some one else."

But anything so logical as this bit of reasoning found no response in Miss Hadley's mind. She looked at him from brimming violet eyes which, Burton confessed to himself, with some cynicism, would have made anything like common sense seem an impertinence to him, if he had been fifteen years younger.

"Papa says that he must have done it," she persisted. "He never did like Hen—Mr. Underwood."

"But I am sure that any personal dislike will not prevent his being fair to him in a case like this. You can help, you know. You can tell your father quite frankly why Mr. Underwood was found loitering in the garden. That will clear him of the most serious part of the evidence against him."

"Wh-what do you mean?" she gasped, looking at him in a kind of terror, and half rising, as though she would flee from the room.

"Mr. Underwood came here last night to see you, didn't he?" he asked, in a matter-of-course tone.

The ready tears overflowed the brimming violet eyes, and, though she dabbed them away with a trifle that she called a handkerchief, they continued to well up and overflow, while she kept the eyes fixed upon him.

"I—I was going away. Papa said that I had to go to my aunt in Williamston, so—that Hen—Mr. Underwood c-could not come and see me. And he c-couldn't even come to say good-by, so he came to the garden, and —and—I was afraid some one might see him if he kept hanging around. It wasn't my fault—he wouldn't pay any attention to me when I told him never to come again——"

"So you went down to the garden to say good-by to him," said Burton cheerfully. "Well, that was kind of

you; and I don't think, for my part, that you could have done any less. He loves you, and you love him, and you had a right to say good-by to him before you went away. Of course, you would stand up for him, just as he would stand up for you. *I* understand!"

Miss Hadley was so surprised by this mode of attack that she could only stare at him in silence.

"Now, what I want you to tell me," Burton continued, "is just when you left Mr. Underwood in the garden and returned to the house."

She continued to stare, in fascinated terror.

"You came in through the window in the drawing-room, didn't you?"

She made the slightest possible sign of assent.

"And you went directly up to your room?"

"Yes."

"And then, when the wind came up, you remembered that you had left the window open, and you went back to close it. Is that it?"

"Y-yes."

"And then, when you got into the hall, what was it that called your attention to your father's room? Was his door open?"

She nodded. "There was a light. I was afraid that he was up and would hear me in the hall; so I peeked through the crack——" She stopped, but she was not weeping now. She evidently saved her tears for her own troubles.

"And then you saw him tied up in bed, and you began to scream—which was the very best thing you could have done, my dear Miss Hadley. How long were you in your room before you remembered about the window?"

"I—don't know."

"You had not begun to undress."

She gave him a startled look.

"I noticed that you were fully dressed. Did you read anything after you went to your room?"

"No."

"Or write anything?"

"No."

"Or sew, or—— I don't know what girls *do* do when they go to their room! But, did you do anything, and how long did it take you? You see, I want to get an idea how long it was between the time when you left Mr. Underwood, after saying good-by to him, and the time when you looked into your father's room."

"I don't know," she wailed, and Burton ground his teeth.

"But it may be very important! You must try to remember. It would have taken quite a while for any one to tie all those knots. Of course, if he was with you in the garden, he was not up in your father's room; and if we can prove that there was not time enough for——"

But she had sprung to her feet, with a little scream. "You don't think he will ever tell that I met him in the garden?"

"Aren't you going to tell, yourself?" asked Burton dryly.

She began to sob again—more with terror, it seemed, than anything else. "Papa would be—so angry!"

"But you wouldn't let that frighten you into silence, when your word would mean so much to him?"

"I wish I had—never seen him. I wish he had never come to—the garden. I never wanted him to come!"

"That wasn't the first time he had come, though, was it? You met him in the garden the evening before, you know," Burton said. He took a positive tone because he did not dare to risk it as a question.

But she met his assertion with a look so startled that it was all the confirmation he needed. Thank goodness! Henry had been here, then, when he had come home in the small hours; and there was no further need to wonder about his whereabouts when the Spriggs fire started. Burton drew a breath of relief.

"I didn't think he would tell," wailed Miss Hadley.

"He didn't," said Burton quickly. "I happened to see him both times—that's how I knew."

"And I never thought he would be

so wicked as to tie my father up in knots!"

"But he didn't, my dear Miss Hadley. You surely know he didn't. He wouldn't have had time, even if there were nothing else. That's what we can prove, you and I. I want you to tell the——"

"Oh, I can't—I can't! I'll say I don't know anything about it, if you try to make me tell. I think you are horrid!"

Burton beat his mind, in despair. How was he to pin this irresponsible child down to the facts of the situation?

Suddenly she looked up from her handkerchief. "Mr. Selby says it was Henry, and now I can see what sort of a man he really is."

"When did he say that?"

"Last night—and to-day."

Burton reflected that Selby certainly knew the advantage of striking when the iron was hot. But he only asked: "Is Mr. Selby a friend of Mr. Underwood's?"

A self-conscious look came into her face, and she dropped her eyes. It was quite evident that her vanity took the jealousy of the two men as a tribute to her powers.

"Does Mr. Selby know that you are engaged to Mr. Underwood?" he asked abruptly.

"N-no!" she stammered.

"Did you tell him that you had just left Mr. Underwood in the garden, last night?"

"No!" she gasped. "You—you *don't* think Mr. Underwood would tell?"

"No, I don't think he would," said Burton. "In fact, I feel quite sure that he would keep silence on that point, at any cost. But *I* am going to tell, if it becomes necessary."

"I will never speak to him again!" she cried desperately. "I will never see him or speak to him again."

Burton held himself from retorting: "It will be better for him if you don't," and merely answered, with as much kindliness as he could put into his voice:

"I shall not speak of it unless it becomes necessary. If we can clear him without that, all right. I know he would rather have it that way. But, if it becomes necessary to prove where he was that evening, in order to prove that he could not have been in your father's room at the same time, I am going to tell the facts. There won't be any harm to you in that. And there isn't anything else to do, if that question comes up."

But Miss Hadley would not answer. She gave him one look of indignant and tearful reproach, and then fled from the room, leaving him to find his way out of the house as best he could.

Burton found himself in a somewhat embarrassing quandary as he considered the matter. While he felt morally satisfied that he had found the true explanation of Henry's presence in the neighborhood, and the proof of his innocence of all complicity in the assault upon the banker, he realized that it would not be easy to convince either a prejudiced public or a jury.

Miss Hadley was obviously not to be counted upon. She might deny the whole thing, or she might be terrified into admitting anything, as to time and place, that the prosecution might wish to draw from her. Undoubtedly, the opposition of her father would seem to the multitude merely another reason for suspecting Henry, instead of being, as Burton saw it, a fairly conclusive proof that he would have been more than ordinarily scrupulous in his dealings with the man whom he hoped to call his father-in-law.

And, of course, Henry would neither tell, nor thank him for telling, a piece of news that would be gossip and cause for laughter in a small town like High Ridge. It was unfortunate that Henry should have fixed his affections upon so unstable a creature as the pretty Miss Hadley, anyhow. Why couldn't he have had the good judgment to choose some one like—well, like his sister, Leslie, who would have walked by the side of the man she loved down into the valley of the shadow of death, if need be?

But then, he reflected cynically, peo-

ple never did show any judgment when it came to falling in love, for the matter of that. There was Miss Underwood, herself. Of course, Philip was a charming boy, and all that, but—he shook his head impatiently, and went on to interview Henry.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

Burton found Henry Underwood, in prison, quite as calm and saturnine as he had been in the garden.

"Have you made any arrangement for counsel?" he asked, after shaking hands.

"Counsel? You mean a lawyer? No."

"Is there some one you would prefer?"

"Do I have to have one?"

"Oh, yes. That's one of the rules of the game."

"Suppose I just don't play?" suggested Henry.

"Then the court will appoint some young lawyer to practice on you. You'd better make your own selection. For one thing, you want a lawyer to arrange to bail you out. This is a bailable offense, you understand; and you don't want to stay in this hole any longer than is necessary."

"Nevertheless, I shall stay for the present," said Henry coolly. "I do not want to be bailed out."

"Why?" demanded Burton.

"For one thing, I will ask no favors of any one. I will not be put in the attitude of suppliant."

"If you will pardon my frankness," said Burton, "that is pig-headed nonsense. But, aside from that point, you won't need to do anything about it. Your lawyer will attend to it. And I herewith offer to put up any bond that may be required; so your pride is saved. It is I who am the suppliant."

Henry looked neither surprised nor grateful. "I told you that I was not going to let myself be bailed out," he said, with some impatience. "Now that they have shut me up in here, they at least can't accuse me of the next thing that happens."

"Oh, I see! Well, if you have the nerve for it, I am not sure that it isn't a good plan," said Burton thoughtfully. "It will certainly eliminate you as a factor, if anything more does happen. Of course, if the person who seems bent on implicating you should be shrewd enough to keep quiet for a while, it would not have the effect you wish for. Have you thought of that possibility?"

"I'm out of it," said Henry shortly. "That's all I care about. And here I am going to stay, until they get tired and let me out, to get rid of me."

"I am really very glad you can take that attitude," said Burton. He spoke sincerely; for the young man's manner contained no personal offense, in spite of his brusqueness, and Burton was the least vain of men. "It leaves us free to work on the outside—and, of course, you understand that I am going to work for you. Now, I want your help so far as you can give it to me. I want to know if you have any idea who is at the bottom of these occurrences—any knowledge, or any suspicion."

"No."

"Of course, you must have given a good deal of thought to it, in the course of all these years. You have never had a glimmering of an idea as to who it is that is persecuting you?"

Henry smiled sardonically. "My mother says it is no persecution—merely the punishment for my evil temper. I suppose you have heard that I have an evil temper?"

"Yes. It gave me a fellow feeling for you. I have an evil temper, myself, at bottom. But, as for punishment, what I want to get at is the human agency. It seems incredible that you should have never, in your own mind, had a suspicion of the guilty party."

"What I may have had in my own mind is neither here nor there," said Henry, knitting his black brows together.

"Have you an enemy, then?"

Henry shrugged his shoulders. "I have no friends."

"Then you absolutely refuse to give me any help?"

"I absolutely refuse to give you what I don't possess," said Henry impatiently.

Burton waited a moment, then he asked suddenly: "Did Selby give you back your knife, before he left the surgery the other night?"

The look that had flashed instantaneously into Henry's eyes at the mention of that name, gave Burton all the information he needed as to Henry's power of hating one man, at least. But the answer to his question was abrupt and positive.

"No."

"Did you notice what he did with it—whether he gave it to your father, or left it on the mantel, or anywhere else?"

"I didn't notice."

"But you are positive that he didn't give it to you, and that you didn't unconsciously drop it into your own pocket?"

"Of course I am positive. I wouldn't be unconscious in connection with anything that Selby was concerned in. If he came near enough to me to hand me anything, I would be conscious of the fact, you may be sure. Why?"

"That knife has been found near the Spriggs house."

Henry frowned.

"The last I saw of that knife, it was in Selby's hands," Burton continued.

"Well, what of it?"

"How did it come to be under the ruins? You must help me to work that out. You are suspected of firing the house—you know that, don't you?"

Henry's eyes fell. "Who says so?" he asked doggedly, but without spirit.

"Selby does."

But this time Burton drew nothing. Henry merely shrugged his shoulders.

"The knife is the only direct link with you," Burton went on. "Therefore, we must explain the knife. How did it get there?"

"What do I know about it—or about anything?" Henry asked impatiently.

But Burton was persistent. "There are two possible theories," he said, watching Henry as he spoke. "The knife may have been left in the surgery when the committee departed, and the incendiary may have found it there and carried it off. I have reasons for believing that some one tried to enter—or, rather, *did* enter—that room in the night. Or, as an alternative theory, Selby may have carried it away with him, either intentionally, or unconsciously, and then dropped it near the Spriggs house—either intentionally or unconsciously."

Henry listened with little softening of the bitterness in his face. "There is another possible theory," he said, with something like a sneer. "I may be lying when I say he didn't give the knife back to me."

"That is, of course, possible," said Burton calmly; "but I don't believe it. At any rate, I'll try out the other theories first. Now, here's another point. Did you buy a ball of stout twine at Proctor's the other day?"

Henry stared. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because Proctor said that he had sold you the cord that Hadley was tied up with. He claimed to identify it. *Did* you buy it of him?"

"I bought a ball of cord—yes."

"What did you do with it?"

"I used it to tie up some heavy vines in the back yard."

"Did you use all of it?"

"No."

"What did you do with the rest—the ball?"

Henry considered. "I don't remember. I may have left it on the ground where I was working."

"You can't be sure about it?"

"No." Henry spoke with an exasperating indifference. It might have been Burton whose honor was involved, and Henry merely an uninterested bystander.

Burton looked at him in great perplexity. His desire to help the man out was not lessened, but he felt baffled by the mask of reserve which Henry refused to lay aside. He so greatly disliked being placed in the attitude of forcing his proffers of assistance

upon an unwilling recipient, that only the thought of Leslie Underwood kept him from wishing to drop the matter then and there. But he did remember, and he put his pride in his pocket.

"All these matters are for your attorney," he said, at last. "If there is any one whom you would rather have, or would rather not have, I wish you'd tell me. I do not want to involve your feelings unnecessarily, and I shall certainly have to confer with your father on the subject."

Henry frowned, but after a moment's hesitation he took a pencil from his pocket, and wrote a name and address on a leaf which he tore from a memorandum book. "I think they would be as good as anybody, if I have to have some one," he said.

Burton took the paper, but he hardly glanced at the name, so interested was he in the pencil with which Henry wrote. It was a short, flat pencil, such as carpenters use, and it made the broad, black mark that Burton already knew from the mysterious missives of warning.

"Do you always use that sort of a pencil?" he asked.

Henry bent his black brows in a look of resentful inquiry. "What if I do?"

"Because it is unusual, and leaves a peculiar mark, easily identified; and because I am assuming that you would rather be cleared than convicted," said Burton, exasperated into impatience. "When it is common report that you are the author of the anonymous messages which appear either in the typewriting of the machine in your house or in that broad, black pencil, there certainly is every reason for finding out who is sufficiently familiar with your ways to imitate them so skillfully. Or is it common knowledge that you use a carpenter's pencil?"

"It is not uncommon for people to use it for things that are to stand weathering," said Henry reluctantly. "I use it in the work I do in the garden."

"Is your custom in the matter generally known?"

"How can I tell?"

"Just for instance, does Selby know?"

But Henry was guarding his expression, now. He shook his head, with rather an elaborate affectation of lack of interest. "I'm sure I couldn't say."

"Who would know your ways? Who comes frequently and familiarly to your house? Does Selby—again, just for instance—have access to your house?"

"No," said Henry coldly. "He never comes there. That is, he never comes to our part of the house. He comes, now and then, to see Ben Bussey about work, but he goes to the back door."

"The back hall, that runs by the door of the surgery?"

"Yes," said Henry. He turned away, as though to mark the end of the conversation, and Burton refrained from pressing him further.

Burton left the jail, a good deal perplexed as to what he really did think of things by this time. He had jumped so enthusiastically to the conclusion, on the night before, that Henry was innocent, that he could not easily relinquish that hope; and yet certainly Henry had not cared at all to help him to establish it as a fact. He seemed to be more than unwilling to make any admission that would throw suspicion on Selby; and yet, if there was anything in expression, he hated Selby. Was it possible that, just because he hated Selby, he was so scrupulous not to implicate him?

The idea struck Burton, at first, merely as a paradox; but, the more he thought about it, the more he began to believe that he had hit upon the truth. It was exactly the sort of quixotism of which the doctor would have been guilty. Perhaps Henry was not so unlike his father as he appeared. If he knew or guessed, for instance, that Miss Hadley was wavering between himself and Selby, it was not difficult to understand that he would have considered it anything but "sporting" to involve his rival in the obloquy which had fallen upon himself. Well, if Miss Hadley was the key that would unlock Henry's heart—or his lips—he must try Miss Hadley again.

He swerved out of his way, to call again upon the banker's daughter.

Miss Hadley was in the drawing-room, and she received him, this time, with an evident embarrassment and hesitation which he attributed to her lingering resentment at his former urgency. But he had already taken her measure. She was one of the people who must never be allowed to exercise free will. She needed a master to keep her from making a fool of herself. He determined at once to assume what he wanted her to believe.

"I have just been to see Mr. Underwood," he said. "He is a fine fellow—but *you* found that out before the rest of the town did! However, everybody will know it, one of these days. We are going to have all this misunderstanding and mystery cleared up, and you will have a chance to be proud of him publicly. But, just now, while he is so unhappy, you must help to cheer him up. Don't you think you might go and see him, and tell him that you believe in him? It would mean a great deal to him. You would seem like an angel of mercy to him."

He had talked rapidly, pressing his plan with a sort of urgency that he would never have dared to use, for instance, with Leslie Underwood. He almost assumed that she would have no opinion to offer, if only he gave her no time to consider.

But she drew away from him, with a look of absolute dismay that was not in the character he had outlined for her. "I couldn't think of it—not at all," she stammered.

"But, you know you are engaged to——"

"Oh, no!" she gasped.

"Well, practically you are," he persisted calmly. "And you know that it would mean more to him——"

"I don't know what you mean, at all," she exclaimed desperately, and unconsciously she glanced at the drawn curtains that separated the drawing-room from a room in the rear.

Burton bit his lip. He certainly had been rashly foolish to assume that he was speaking tête-à-tête with Miss Hadley. Who was in the back room? Her father? If he understood Mr. Hadley's temperament, he would have burst into the room to demand an explanation, by this time. Could it possibly be Selby who was eavesdropping? If so, he would give that gentleman something for his pains!

"Mr. Underwood has enemies," he said calmly. "Mr. Selby, for instance, is not friendly to him. Of course, you know that, and you will understand that anything he may say to you about his rival ought to be discounted. I don't need to suggest to you which is the more worthy of faith and credit. One is a gentleman, the other isn't. Of course, there could never for a moment be a question of counting the two men equal."

Then, fearful, from the terrified dismay on her face, that if he kept on she would say something that would give the situation away, he switched the conversation off upon tracks of glittering generality, and spun it out as long as he dared. If Selby really were in the back room, waiting for him to go, he was going to give him his money's worth. He even ventured on a form of open flattery, which he guessed would make Selby furious, and which certainly made Miss Hadley stare at him in innocent amazement. When the lengthening shadows forced him at last to take his leave, he took it with a lingering deliberation that measured out exasperation to his hidden enemy drop by drop.

He went immediately to his own room in the hotel, which, it will be remembered, overlooked the Hadley house, and sat down by the open window to read the evening papers. There was no reason, surely, why he should not sit by his own window. He had to wait nearly half an hour, but he was rewarded. At the end of that time, Selby came out of the house, and, with a dark glance toward the hotel, hurried up the street.

Burton laughed softly, but, after a while, he began to wonder just what he had gained by his absurd punishment of the eavesdropper. Nothing, probably, except a malicious satisfaction which was not particularly creditable

to him. He disliked Selby instinctively; but, unless Selby could be shown to have an active hand in the mysterious disturbances which had been laid at Henry's door, he had no quarrel with him. It was questionable wisdom to antagonize Selby unnecessarily, at this stage of the proceedings. However, the first thing to do, now, was to see Doctor Underwood and consult with him as to the steps to be taken for securing legal counsel.

It was noticeable that the necessity of calling at the Red House immediately lightened the burden of the day's affairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

BURTON'S TURN.

The surgery, whatever claim it may originally have had to the title, appeared now to be the doctor's den and smoking room. Mrs. Bussey indicated that he would find the doctor there; and Burton did not attempt to conceal from himself the pleasure with which he discovered that Leslie was with her father, and that she gave no sign of any intention to beat an immediate retreat.

"How is my patient?" he asked, with an elaborate assumption of the popular physician's "bedside manner."

"Mighty glad to see you," said Doctor Underwood, with a look that made the words go home. "Leslie and I have been sitting here cultivating a magnificent crop of the blues. There was trouble enough before, but this affair——"

"Is the best possible thing that could have happened, because it will bring matters to a crisis," answered Burton. "I told you that I am firmly convinced that your son is innocent, and I hold to that belief, in spite of the unnatural conduct of his father in feeling discouraged. I have been talking with Mr. Underwood in the jail."

"Did you get any satisfaction out of your conversation?" asked the doctor dryly. "If you did, I'll engage you as my official interpreter."

"Not very much concrete satisfaction, perhaps, but a good deal of subjective reassurance. I am firmly convinced that he is the victim, first, of his own pride and bitterness, and, second, of some unscrupulous enemy, who is taking advantage of the state of the public mind to throw unmerited discredit upon him."

"That's what Leslie says. But how are we going to make it clear to the world at large? And things have now reached a point where the world at large will have to be taken into the family confidence, to a disconcerting extent. Leslie, I wish you were married and overseas."

Leslie looked as though it might be a relief to her to allow her spirits to droop, but at this challenge she lifted her head gallantly. "Then you would put me to all the trouble and expense of a trip back overseas to come to you," she said promptly. "Counsel to run away from trouble doesn't come with a good grace from you, father. You have never set me the example."

"You see what influence I have over my children," said the doctor, appealing to Burton.

"I'm beginning to see. My sympathies go out to you. Let us talk of some less distressing matter. For instance—Miss Hadley." He glanced from one to the other as he spoke the name, but in neither face could he read the slightest consciousness. A curious impulse of masculine loyalty to Henry made him hesitate to divulge the secret which Henry had evidently guarded so carefully that it was unsuspected by his family. "I have just been calling on Miss Hadley," he added, in lame explanation. "I wanted to get some further particulars. But that really should be the work of your son's lawyer, doctor; and that's what I specially wanted to consult with you about. I want your permission to send for a real lawyer—a big man, who will bring the very best skill and experience to the case. You won't object?"

The doctor hesitated a moment before he answered. "Is a big man necessary, if the case is to turn on facts? Frankly, I can't afford a big lawyer,

you know. I'd rather take a local man with a sickly family, so that I could work it out in bills. I know it sounds sordid; but that is the mercenary habit of the world, and I can't hope to change it out of hand. *I* would be perfectly willing to ignore matters of that sort, but—the big lawyer wouldn't."

"I see," said Burton, recognizing that one of the impossibilities in the case was any offer of financial assistance on his own part. "Perhaps you are right. If we can simply establish the facts, we won't need any hired eloquence to present them. They will speak for themselves. Well, we will establish the facts."

"But, how? How?" demanded Leslie eagerly.

"I have one or two fragmentary theories in my mind. In the first place, I——"

But he got no farther, for suddenly there was an alarming clash and clatter in the back hall. Both Burton and Leslie sprang for the door. But the sight that met their eyes was not nearly so alarming as the noise. It was merely Mrs. Bussey, gathering up the broken pieces of a starch box, which lay in suspicious proximity to a kitchen chair, which stood in equally suspicious proximity to the transom of the door to the surgery.

"I was jest a-trying to get down them cobwebs!" she gasped, and retreated hastily to the safe precincts of the kitchen, with the unreliable box.

Burton took up his theme as though he had not been interrupted, deeming it wisest to take no further notice of this curious domestic situation.

"Your son does not wish to take advantage of his unquestionable privilege of bail," he said to the doctor. "He goes on the theory that things will continue to happen, and that he will, therefore, be cleared by implication. I can't say I feel sure of it. This unknown enemy seems to be quite astute enough to suspend operations while Mr. Underwood is under lock and key, merely to avoid giving him the vindication which he would like to secure in that way. But perhaps it might be as well to let him carry out his plan for a time. It will probably give you a temporary respite from further disturbances."

"Even that will be gratefully received," said the doctor wearily.

"It will, at least, give us time," said Burton.

And then, feeling that his friends needed to be taken away from the thought of the burden which they were carrying, he turned the conversation upon impersonal matters. He deliberately laid himself out to be entertaining—and the effort was more of a compliment than they were apt to realize. When finally he said good night, he had to admit that he had enjoyed the evening very much. Of course, it wouldn't do to ask Miss Underwood if she had had as good a time as he had—but, at any rate, she had not looked bored. But then, she would hardly have told a man to his face that she found him dull.

His thoughts were running along after this idiotic fashion, when he became aware that a man was following him in the street. He noticed it, at first, merely because the street was otherwise so entirely deserted; and it did not occur to him that the man was actually dogging him until he had turned a corner or two, and found that the man did the same. Then he slackened his pace, and the man fell back. By this time he began to be curious. He took a couple of unnecessary turns, and satisfied himself that the pursuit was no accident. Then he turned sharply on his heel, and made a jump toward his pursuer. But the man dodged, jumped from the sidewalk, and ran off between two buildings.

The incident puzzled Burton, and made him somewhat uncomfortable. High Ridge was a place of mysteries. Also, he reflected, it was a place of very few policemen. Was his pursuer a common street bandit, with designs on his purse, or was he connected with the Underwood mystery and the warning that had been sent to him at the hotel?

He had turned aside from his most direct route to the hotel, in this exper-

iment, and he now found himself in a street with which he was not familiar, though he knew the general location. He turned in the direction where his hotel must be, and was glad to hear no longer the sound of feet behind him. He was in the shadow of a large business block when a man sprang out suddenly from a driveway and jumped at him.

The attack was so sudden and so fierce, and Burton was so unprepared, that for a moment he was borne backward and almost carried to the ground. How he recovered himself he could not have told. The primitive instinct of the fighting animal awoke within him, and perhaps some of the acquired skill of his college days came back. He knew that he was fighting for his life; for the hand that he had clutched held a knife, and there was no mistaking the vicious energy that his assailant was exerting. Burton answered with a strength that he had not known he possessed. He felt the man's body yielding inch by inch under his clutch, and then suddenly it slipped away from his hands, and the man darted off and disappeared into the night, leaving Burton panting and disheveled and very much amazed.

Never before had he had occasion to defend his life—he had always taken it for granted that civilization would take that burden off the hands of any decent man. And yet here, in a quiet little village, where he was practically unknown, he had been assailed by some one who really wanted to kill him! He was quite sure that the man's object had not been merely thievish. His attack was personally vicious.

Suddenly, he remembered how he had kept Selby cooling his heels in Miss Hadley's back parlor while he amused himself with Miss Hadley, and the satisfaction he had taken in the situation faded into a rather serious inquiry. Selby was a man of violent temper, and he had no occasion to love him. But did he have occasion to hate him to the death? If so, there could be but one reason—he feared Burton's investigations.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ODD KNOT.

Burton awoke the next morning with a consuming desire to go at once and look at Selby. If it really had been he who had been guilty of that midnight attack, was it in human power for him to conceal all trace of his consciousness? Burton recalled the note of warning which had been left for him at the clerk's desk, and afterward abstracted from his room. Selby lodged in the hotel, and had, therefore, the advantage of position. He could have come and gone without attracting attention. A stranger could not. Certainly, he must take a look at Selby.

He found the contractor at his desk in the rear of a large and crowded room, which appeared to be a combined office and workroom. Selby looked up as Burton entered, but scowled instead of nodding, and went on talking to a workman who was receiving instructions. Burton merely nodded, and took a chair to wait. Selby gave him plenty of time to it. Burton could not help feeling, after a while, that he was being ignored for the express purpose of insult; and, to remove the sting of the enforced waiting, he got up and sauntered across the room, to look at a collection of Indian baskets, moccasins, and pipes, fastened against the wall.

The specimens were of little intrinsic beauty and less commercial value, but Burton knew something about Indian basketry, and these examples of the common work of the mid-continent tribes interested him. More, they stirred some pulse of thought deep down in his mind. There was some connection—something—of which those baskets were trying to remind him. He stared at them so intently that he did not notice that the workmen had finally departed, until Selby pushed back his chair, arose, and grudgingly came over to where he stood.

"Looking at my Indian things?" he asked, with an uneasy assumption of civility.

"Yes, they interest me. Where did you get hold of them?"

"Oh, just picked them up. I've been about among the Indians a good deal."

"I've made a collection, myself, of the work of the Aleutians," said Burton, glad to find some abstract topic which would serve as a springboard for the intercourse which he meant to establish with Mr. Selby. "So, naturally, these things catch my eye. From the artistic standpoint, they don't compare, of course, with the work of the Alaskan Indians; but they are good indications of the tribal development."

As he talked, he remembered suddenly the old Indian woman at the station, and Selby's rudeness. How he and Selby had clashed at every meeting! "Where did you know the Indians?"

"Hereabouts. In the early days."

"Right here? In High Ridge?"

"High Ridge wasn't on the map, then. The Indians lived all over this part of the country before the settlers came."

"And you really remember back to those days? It sounds very far back."

"Twenty-five years will cover a good deal of history in this part of the country. High Ridge has grown up inside of that time, and most of the people here don't know any more about Indians than you do." The words were innocent enough, but there was an insolence in the tone that made Burton feel that the ice of courtesy between them was thin, as well as cool. He turned from the baskets, and said abruptly:

"I suppose you heard that Henry Underwood's knife was found near the Spriggs' house."

"Yes," said Selby, looking at Burton defensively under his eyebrows.

"It was the same knife you used to pry up the hearthstones with, the evening that your committee called on the doctor. You broke the point, you know. Do you remember whether you gave the knife to Henry or to the doctor when you left?"

"I gave it to Henry," said Selby deliberately.

"Did something fix that fact in your memory?"

"Do you mean that I am lying?" demanded Selby aggressively.

"Let us limit our discussion to what I am actually saying," said Burton, with the access of politeness which he was apt to assume when ruffled. "I merely wanted to know what your position would be in case any question is raised in regard to that knife. But probably it never will be."

"Not just at present," said Selby, with white lips. "The fool has his hands full enough, for the present, with the Hadley outrage. When we are through with that, we will take up the Spriggs matter. I rather think we can keep Mr. Underwood busy for some time to come."

"You have done pretty well in that direction, up to this time," said Burton, with a congratulatory smile. "I hope you will console yourself with that reflection when luck turns. We must all learn to bear reverses patiently." He smiled, bowed elaborately, and left the office.

Once outside, he reflected on his folly. "I am a blessed fool as a diplomat," he said to himself. "I seem unable to deny myself the pleasure of making him angry."

The sight of Selby's curios had set his mind off on the thought of Indians, and, since he had nothing else to do, he turned his steps to the railway station, where he had seen the Indian woman with her wares, on the day of his arrival.

She was there again, and when Burton stopped before her she looked up, with a broad smile, which might have meant recognition and gratitude, or merely commercial hopes.

"How!" she said, and Burton responded "How!" Then, suddenly, his eye caught something that made him bend over her wares in very real interest. The burden basket in which her goods were stowed was a netlike bag, made of flexible thongs of hide, tied together with a peculiar knotting. It made him think of the uncommon

knot that he had noticed in the cords that bound Mr. Hadley, and in the cord that had fastened the lilac withes together about the baby. He was sufficiently expert in Indian basketry to feel certain that it was the same knot, and that it was a peculiar and individual knot—an adaptation of an old knot, undoubtedly, but none the less distinctly and recognizably original.

"Did you make that basket?" he asked.

"Nice," she said cheerfully, holding up a beaded basket of birch bark.

"No, this big basket. How much?"

She giggled, and tried to take it from him. Evidently, it had not been invoiced for sale. But Burton wanted that, and no other. He took a bill from his pocketbook, and, recovering forcible possession of the basket, laid the bill on her capacious knee.

"All right," he said authoritatively, and waited to see if she would confirm him. She took up the bill, and put it away in her pocket. She might not understand the methods of the paleface, but she undoubtedly understood the language that his money spoke.

"Who make this basket?" he asked; but this went into linguistic difficulties. She pattered something unintelligible, and hastily tied up her remaining wares in her shawl. Burton tried in various ways to explain his meaning, but finally gave it up, because she departed from his neighborhood with a haste that suggested fear on her part lest he might repent him of his spendthriftiness, and try to recover his money.

Burton was left alone with his burden basket, and, as he examined it, his excitement grew. At last he had something positive—something to work with. There was a definite clue in that Indian basket. *Who in High Ridge knew how to tie that peculiar knot?* He must consult Doctor Underwood at once.

Incidentally, it was curious how all roads led inevitably to the Red House.

The continuation of this story will be published two weeks later, in the January month-end issue; on sale December 25th.

THE RICHEST MAN IN THE WORLD

THE fact that the czar of Russia made a contribution of $100,000,000 from his private purse to the Russian war fund reminds us that Mr. Rockefeller is not the only rich man in the world. There are a few others, and there is hardly a doubt that the Russian monarch overtops the Standard Oil emperor, not only as the first of autocrats but as the first of plutocrats.

Most royalties are very small potatoes financially compared with any one of our own particular brand of millionaires. Mr. Rockefeller could put all the sovereigns of Europe, except the czar, on his pay roll at their present wages without depriving himself of a single meal or the least of his extravagances. He could pay the salary of King Edward or of the kaiser for a year out of a month's income, and have something left for car fare.

But the Russian emperor is in a different class. In the imperial budget the allowance for his household is figured at the meagre rate of about $8,000,000 a year, but that is merely the beginning of his resources. He owns a great part of Russia as his private property—mines, forests, and illimitable stretches of arable lands. The state owns twenty times as much more, and the czar is the state. In Siberia the imperial resources are still more opulent. Most of the rich mines of gold, platinum, and precious stones are worked for the benefit of the czar and his family.

The Girl Upstairs

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Mrs. Sweeny's Boss," "What the Cards Knew," Etc.

In her palmy days, Belle Sweeny, through her husband's race-track associations, was brought into contact with many varieties of people; and she learned to know the world. How the knowledge proved of benefit to a sister, is dramatically told in this story, with many characteristic illuminating remarks on life and its problems, as they appealed to the shrewd bookmaker's widow

A SURFACE car stopped in front of Mrs. Sweeny's home, in Central Park West, and a young girl alighted from it. Mrs. Sweeny was looking out of the window. The girl was a very pretty example of metropolitan tailoring; her clothes were perfect in fit and construction. Moreover, she was possessed of a splendidly proportioned figure, lithe and erect, and alluringly endowed with curves. Her eyes were large and blue, the freshness of the country was in her cheeks, and her mouth was the one used by Cupid as the model for his new bow.

Mrs. Sweeny scrutinized every detail of the picture. An envious sneer puckered her lips.

"That's Martha Forbes," she informed the Boarder. "She lives in the flat above us."

"She is a remarkably beautiful creature," said the Boarder admiringly.

"Um-ye-s," admitted Mrs. Sweeny, with much reluctance, "but she's awful stuck up. I s'pose she thinks she's a lot better than Dan Sweeny's widow lady, whose dresses has been made over so often that they've got the habit and cry for it every spring. But when my poor dead husban' was makin' book at the track, she couldn't have put it over me none—all Danny had to do was to walk on the street with me, and then he could get credit at the saloon. I didn't feel it none, either. But this girl upstairs is dif'rent; she passed me in the hall the other day, and didn't speak. Well, I s'pose I am shabby as a last year's awning, mister, but I didn't usta be—wait!"

She left the room, and, after a few minutes, returned with a heap of red velvet in her arms.

"This here dress," she began, "was one I wore at Saratoga. It cost——"

During her narrative, she had been glancing out of the window. Now she stared fixedly at a man who had swung himself from a car.

"Mister!" she exclaimed. "There's Al Peters!"

"Who?" asked the Boarder.

"Al Peters," she repeated, in a voice that vibrated with surprise.

"Well?" The Boarder's tone had a rising inflection.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped the watcher. "You're the limit! Seems like every time I tell you anything, I've got to map it out, like a feller diagramin' the route of a sewer. Al Peters—get it?—Al Peters. A-l, Al: P-e-t——→"

"Now, Mrs. Sweeny," protested the Boarder, "that's unkind."

"'Scuse me, mister," she said, in a softer tone; "but I guess seein' him upset me. He's a terrible man, mister, a horrible man!"

Again she turned to the window, and observed this person, Peters. She seemed unable to take her eyes from him; her attention amounted to fasci-

nation, in which there was the shrinking of dread. What she saw was a man of forty, of medium height, and somewhat stout. He was clean shaven, and his clothes were irreproachable in cut and drape. But his face was red and coarse and brutal; it was bad. Peters was typical of the Broadway habitué.

Mrs. Sweeny watched him as he stood at the corner, evidently uncertain of his whereabouts. He took a notebook from his pocket and studied it. Then he sauntered to the entrance of the house, and looked at the number.

Mrs. Sweeny faced the Boarder, startled.

"Mister!" she cried. "He's coming in—he's coming in!"

With a puzzled expression, she stared at the Boarder.

"What do you s'pose he's up to?" she queried. For a time, she stood pondering, her lower lip in the intermittent grip of her fine, white teeth, and her brow slightly wrinkled. The Boarder, observing her, had come to the conclusion that Al Peters was an unusually disturbing element in her existence. And her next words verified his conjecture:

"I'll tell you this much, mister, right now; Al Peters hasn't any respect for women. I know, mister. My Danny had to punch him so hard, once, for me, that he stretched out like a piece of flat work on an ironin' board. Dan had a lovely punch, mister. Why, once he lammed Dutch Looie on both sides of the jaw—bing, bing!—so hard that it made dents; and ever since Looie has talked pigeon-toed." She stopped, and left the room, with a "'Scuse me, mister."

Going to the telephone, she took the receiver from the hook.

"Henry," the Boarder heard her say to the hall boy at the switch board—"Henry, who did that feller that just come in, ask for? Remember that there quarter I give you the other day, and uncan a few words, Henry."

There was silence. Then——

"The i-dee! The i-dee-e! . . . Well, ain't he the——. Henry, you're a good boy . . . Thanks . . . Good-by, Henry."

There was a queer expression in her eyes when she returned.

"He's honorin' the uppish Miss Forbes with his distinguished presence," she explained sarcastically. "I don't wish her no hard luck; but I hope she lives to find out just what he is. He's a married man, and the biggest scoundrel in New York. Mister, that man insulted me once—like he's done to every woman he ever met. I could tell that girl a few things that would make her throw him out of the house. But I won't."

Her mouth closed with a snap, and, as the minutes passed, she appeared to be gloating over the sad disillusionment that must come to the girl upstairs.

The Boarder recalled a day when she had bared her soul to him about her poverty and her longing for the pretty feminine gewgaws—gowns and lingerie, and the filmy silk stockings which were hers during her life with Dan. And he dimly realized that the dainty woman in the flat above had, by flaunting her finery in Mrs. Sweeny's face, aroused the demon jealousy until it was furiously raging within the less fortunate woman. It began to dawn on him that perhaps the rudeness of the episode in the hall had been unintentional. The girl did not look underbred.

After a while, Mrs. Sweeny said: "It's too bad us ladies has to meet men like that Al. She"—glancing toward the ceiling—"is goin' to regret it, because she ain't his kind. She's a nice girl—I got to admit that. Her home was in Dayton, Ohio, and her pa died and left her a little money; so she come here and started a stenographer shop. She has eight girls workin' for her, and makes enough to live well and have pretty clothes. You know, her and me has been sort of chums in a dumbwaiter way, till a few days ago. The same iceman fetches us ice, and one day when hers was goin' up, I hollers to the man:

"'Is that my ice?'

"And the iceman, he yells: 'Naw, that ain't your ice.'

"And I says, right back at him: 'Well, it looks like my ice.'

"And the little girl upstairs, she laughs, and says: 'I can always tell my ice, because it's always cold, and looks wet.'

" 'It's one on me,' I says. And from that day we had bawlin' matches up and down the dumbwaiter shaft right along. I'd say somethin' about how the butcher skinned folks somethin' fierce, and she'd say: 'Ain't it the truth?' and all such afternoon call stuff. I liked her, mister, and I knew in a minute that she was a awful nice girl —you trust a woman for gettin' wise to other women——"

She was obliged to break off abruptly at the summons of the telephone bell. When she returned from answering it, she announced:

"The hall boy's my fr'en'. He rung up to tell me that him and her has just went out. She left word that if anybody called, she was at a matinée. Mister, I don't wish her no hard luck, as I said; but she's goin' to learn what the worst type of New York men is like."

"Some men are cads," growled the Boarder. "Do you think she even knows he is married?"

"Not her," flashed Mrs. Sweeny, "for she ain't that kind." Unconsciously she was championing the late thorn in her flesh. "That girl just ain't wise to the city. I s'pose she met Al in her shop. His bus'ness, when he ain't bettin' on the races, is gettin' a bale of minin' stock printed and sendin' out come-on letters to doctors and preachers, tellin' what a good investment that waste paper is. I s'pose he run across her while he was lookin' for somebody to typewrite his swindlin' literature."

"The law ought to get him," said the Boarder.

"There's a lot of people it ought to get, and don't," she reminded him; "and there's a lot of things folks ought to do, and don't. Now, there's a lady named Belle Sweeny that ought to do this: she ought to dress up and lay for them people down in the hall, when the show is let out. Then she ought to go up to Al Peters and say: 'Why, how-de-do, Mister Peters? Ain't you the stranger, though! I ain't saw you for so long it would give a clock the pip to tick it off. Do tell me, how is Missis Peters? Tell her I want her to call on me.' Say, I guess that would start somethin', yes?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed the Boarder.

"Well, I ain't goin' to do it," snapped Mrs. Sweeny. "She's in for it, now; and I wasn't hired to look after her. Young girls has no business runnin' 'round this town with men they don't know anything about, anyway."

There was a finality about it, and a heartlessness, too, that caused woe in the Boarder's heart. Also, his hitherto good opinion of his extraordinary landlady suffered a slump. When she went out of his apartment to look after her household cares, he spent a good hour in pondering over the plight of the girl upstairs, and his heart was heavy within him.

Between the hours of five and six, that afternoon, Mrs. Sweeny went downstairs four times. On each trip, she casually inquired if Miss Forbes had returned. She received negative answers. At half-past six, she remembered that she had not done her dinner marketing. She decided that she had no appetite; so it made no difference. When the hands of the clock pointed to a quarter of seven, she stamped her foot.

"Belle Sweeny!" she exclaimed. "You're a fine piece of work, you are! What are you worryin' about that stuck-up thing, for? Mind your own business. Her and Al is prob'ly stayin' downtown for dinner."

After which, she dressed herself with care, donning the most sensational gown in her possession. Entering the Boarder's rooms, she found him about to go out for his lonely restaurant dinner.

"You've got to be a sport, to-night, mister," she began authoritatively. "I want you to put on your gol-darn-it

clothes, and steer a helpless skirt through the Bright-Light district."

"Uh-what?" he stammered.

"Not that I don't know Broadway at night better than you do," she continued, "but a lady has got to have a es-cort down there after dark, and I've got to mix in a bit." She rushed out of the room, and as hurriedly entered again, holding in her hand a roll of bills. "Here's the rent money for expenses. I don't know where any more's comin' from, but I've hung up the landlord before, and I can do it again. You see, mister, you and me can't stick around and see that poor little girl get in wrong, can we?"

He stared at her, surprised; then he smiled cheerfully.

"I've made up my mind that Al has steered her into some lobster palace for dinner," Mrs. Sweeny informed him. "I'm goin' to find her, and fetch her home, where she belongs. Are you game?"

"Yes," said the Boarder positively. "I am. In a minute, Mrs. Sweeny, I shall be with you—and please put that money back where you hide it. I am perfectly able, not to say willing, to finance this expedition."

Mrs. Sweeny weakly protested against the preservation of her hoard, but the Boarder was obdurate, and she subsided. When, after a few minutes, he appeared in evening clothes, she cried:

"Gee, mister, I never saw you in them rags before. Say, you look almost as good as a capper for a gamblin' house, loafin' in a swell hotel—or a wine agent!" This was a high compliment, for Mrs. Sweeny's ideal of masculine exquisiteness was the piece of sartorial perfection last mentioned.

The Boarder bowed his acknowledgments. "Where do you contemplate finding those people?" he asked.

"Downtown," she responded vaguely.

"But 'downtown' is a big place—where?" insisted the Boarder.

"You tell," she retorted.

"I was a reporter before I became an editorial writer," he began. "I used to find missing people and solve mysteries——"

"Then it ought to be a cinch to locate 'em," she interrupted mockingly.

The Boarder was perplexed, and his face showed it. He stood before her in nervous meditation, his eyes roaming about the room.

"Here!" cried Mrs. Sweeny sharply, "we've only got a little while to do this in; we've got to catch 'em while they're at dinner. They may go to a show, afterward, and then there won't be no chance. Listen! First, let's try to find out what matinée they went to—come on!"

Catching his hand, she dragged him to the elevator. Once downstairs, she slipped a dollar bill in the telephone boy's hand.

"Now, Henry," she said, "I'm lookin' for information, see? You won't get in no trouble over it. Tell me; did the lady we was talkin' about this afternoon mention what matinée she was goin' to?"

"No," said Henry, "but——" He hesitated, and looked sheepish.

"Go on, Henry," she commanded; "you know me, Henry."

"Yes'm," he agreed; "you always played square with me, Mrs. Sweeny, and I guess I can tell you where they went—it was 'The White Elephant.'"

Mrs. Sweeny laughed. "Oh, you boys!" she exclaimed. "You don't never listen on the wire, do you?"

The boy grinned shamefacedly. "You won't tell, will you?" he demanded.

"Not me, Henry," she assured him. Then, to the Boarder: "Come on. It ought to work out for us, now. 'The White Elephant's' at the Folly Theatre. Manson's and Turner's and a bunch of them rest'raunts is around there. Now, let's figger it out a little more. Al, he's a race-track plunger. You can alwus find him hangin' 'round where the bookmakers and all that crowd has headquarters. Just now they're patronizin' Manson's. I'll bet my phony curls against car fare that we find them two there. He'll want them other fellers to see what a pretty

girl he's got. Come on, mister, let's hurry."

It was almost eight o'clock when they entered Manson's. The place was thronged with a laughing, well-dressed crowd of diners. An air of comfortable prosperity pervaded it; the faces of the men were duly gluttonous; the women, many of them beautiful to look at, had hard eyes. Artificiality was everywhere. This was the advance guard of New York's gay, killing night life, that begins sluggishly in the early evening and ends hilariously with the dawn.

Mrs. Sweeny's eyes were bright as she made her way through the room she knew so well. In this place she and her departed Danny had passed many a riotous night, in company with Dan's noisy compatriots. A successful day at the track had meant that she would be dragged into the society of adventurers, the country's riffraff, temporarily in funds won at the track, and various grades of undesirables. Many of the diners remembered her, and nodded as she passed; but surprise was evident in nearly every face, for she had lived a retired life since her husband's demise.

"Here's a table where we can get a line on who's here," she said, leading the Boarder toward it. "I'll sit on this side, and you sit there."

She seated herself, and had scarcely begun her searching survey of the diners, when she whispered excitedly:

"There they are!"

"Where?" questioned the Boarder.

"Over there—at the fourth table from us. Gee! wasn't I a good guesser? Ain't I the gum-shoe lady, though! It was as easy as gettin' a large and easy crowd to play ther races."

The waiter came up.

"Now," she remarked, "we haven't time for much, for we got in late, and we're goin' to the theatre. What do you say to a couple of club sandwiches now, mister, and some coffee? Then we can come back after the show and eat four thousand dollars' worth."

"I agree," said the Boarder; and the waiter hurried away.

After he was gone, Mrs. Sweeny went more into details. "We might have to get up any minute and follow them. So, what's the use of orderin' more'n half the card. Them waiters treat you scandalous for a shine order like that; but I guess my little talk went with him. Now, tell me; how am I goin' to handle this situation?"

"You should go over and warn the girl," promptly advised the Boarder.

"And have him start somethin'? I guess not!" She spoke with decision. "We got to handle this thing with gloves. You've forgotten one thing. She may have us fooled about herself. She may be perfectly contented where she is. I'll know about that in a few minutes. No, mister, none of that coarse work. You don't know men like Al. They're apt to get up, right in this swell rest'raunt, and make a awful fuss! And the management has to stand for it, because they're the parties that keep the place goin'. So, you just do a little thinkin', and help me out."

While she was talking, Mrs. Sweeny was closely watching the two people at the other table. They had finished their dinner, but a wine cooler on the floor showed a reason for dallying. The man was in a talkative mood. He had three champagne corks in front of him, and his fingers crushed into them as he spoke to the girl. Far across the table he leaned, his coarse, animal face thrust forward. And, as Mrs. Sweeny took in the scene, she knew that she was wrong to question Martha Forbes. The girl's cheek was turned toward herself and the Boarder, but the profile showed annoyance in the parted lips, the wide-open eye, and the brow, a-pucker. Clearly she was ill at ease. There was a glass of bubbling liquid at her place; but it had not been touched. Her escort, however, emptied his glass as often as it was filled by a diligent waiter.

Mrs. Sweeny and the Boarder were not the only observers of the pair. Several people near by had become interested. Whenever Peters felt impelled to quaff more of the fizzing bev-

erage, his companion gazed helplessly about the room, as if to avoid the sight. When he thrust his evil face across the table again, she stiffened into an erect position, as if shrinking from him. At intervals, she would vehemently shake her head, as Peters said something, and motioned toward her full wineglass.

"Fine!" whispered Mrs. Sweeny. "She's livin' up to what I thought she was. He's tryin' to get her to drink that stuff, and she ain't goin' to do it. She realizes she's with a beast. Good for her! Even if I don't like her, I'm glad to see that I didn't make no mistake in her. She's had good raisin' at home, and it's stickin' by her. Al don't like it at all; but he understands by this time that she means what she says, and he's apt to brace up and try to be a gent'm'n so she'll think well of him, again. Mister, we've just got to pry 'em apart, some way."

"That is true," said the Boarder, who was deeply worried.

"We'll have to do it right away; they'll leave in a few minutes."

"But how?" queried the Boarder.

"Well," answered Mrs. Sweeny desperately, "we'll just do it—we'll do somethin'." She was nervously tapping the table with her fingers, and peering anxiously about the room, as if hoping for relief from an unexpected source, when the head waiter passed. She stared at him dully; then a quick light came into her eyes. She had known that man in the old days. He had fattened on Danny's extravagant tips. Momentarily, the hope in her eyes died, for, the source of plenty having disappeared, he might conveniently forget her.

"Theodore!" she called.

He turned, and regarded her vacantly. Then, bowing and smiling, he glided back to her with the experienced waiter's soft, ingratiating movement. Yet, there was more than mere courtesy in his manner. He was greeting a patron whom he liked, and there was respectful joy in his salutation:

"You do not come often, now; you would be most welcome."

"Nope," she admitted, "there's no one to fetch me." She dropped her eyes and sighed. The time when it had been good to live would come back; and it was not so very long ago.

"Theodore," she continued, "even if I ain't in the gang any more, would you do me a favor?"

"Madam needs but to state it." She sighed again, as she noted the familiar odd foreign twist to his speech.

"I'll be frank with you, Theodore. That girl with Al Peters is a friend of mine. I don't want her with him—he's a bad actor, Theodore—I guess I don't need to go into it farther with you?"

"Yes," he said, and frowned. "It is the money, madam, that gives the entrée to many." There was a world of meaning in his words, and yet he had made no definite statement. He had been a head waiter for a long time.

"Tim Hogan is Al's side kicker yet, ain't he?" she asked.

"That is true," corroborated Theodore.

"Then, will you get word to him that Tim wants to see him in the lobby of the Hotel Ashmore—that's only across the street. Say it's important, and will only take a minute. I'll get that girl away while he's out. Of course, he'll make a roar when he comes back, but you can say a bell hop brought the message——"

Theodore smiled, and shrugged his shoulders. Was he not an adept at clearing himself from blame? Pouf! That one should be told what was a part of his business!

"Will you, Theodore—will you?" Mrs. Sweeny's voice was softly pleading.

"Yes," assented Theodore, with the air of a man who liked his assignment. He glanced over at the beautiful, flower-like girl and the low, disgusting person with her, and added: "Yes, and gladly, madam."

He left them, and sauntered up the room. Immediately Mrs. Sweeny was all action.

"Get the check, and pay it," she ordered. "Tell 'em to bring your coat and hat." After the bustle attendant upon these things was over, she said reflectively:

"I don't believe that girl meant nothin' by passin' me without speakin'—she ain't got that kind of thing in her face. Mebby she was just worried over somethin', or didn't see me. What do you think?"

"I'm inclined to agree——" He stopped and whispered: "Look!"

The head waiter was approaching Al's table. He bent over and said something. Peters looked annoyed, then spoke to the girl, who nodded assent.

"Be ready!" cautioned Mrs. Sweeny, highly excited.

Peters arose, and started for the door.

"Now!" she commanded.

In another instant, they were on their feet, pushing quickly among the tables. Before Al Peters had secured his hat from the check boy, Mrs. Sweeny's hand was upon the young woman's shoulder.

"Come, dearie," she said, in a soft, but compelling, voice. "I've come to take you home."

Miss Forbes was startled; but she instantly recognized Mrs. Sweeny. And at once a look of surpassing relief spread over her face.

"Oh," she whispered, "I've been so frightened!"

"Come; don't talk, now—there ain't time—he'll be back!" Mrs. Sweeny, inwardly quaking at her boldness, pulled the young woman to her feet.

"He's been—drinking—too much, and——"

"Don't talk—come!"

It all occurred so quietly that only those diners nearest them were aware that something unusual was happening.

"If we run into him, don't argue with him; we'll stand by you," advised Mrs. Sweeny, as they left the place. Once outside, she cried: "Quick—a taxicab!"

As they rolled away in it, Mrs. Sweeny, closely watching the Ashmore entrance, exclaimed:

"There he is, madder'n a man hookin' a dress. Oh, you choofer, open her up—open her up!" And up Broadway they tore, leaving the exasperated Peters to untangle the mystery as best he could.

"Mrs. Sweeny," said the girl, in a serious voice, "I don't know why you did this for me; but I want to thank you. I wanted to get away, but I'm not accustomed to city ways, and I didn't know how—what to say—what to do."

Mrs. Sweeny meditated a moment, then she said bluntly: "I did it because you cut me dead in the hall, my dear."

Miss Forbes looked at her, uncomprehending. After a while, she sank back into the cushions, thoroughly mystified and hurt. At the door of the apartment house, she fumbled about in a silver bag she carried, and brought forth a sealed envelope.

"I meant to have left this for you, to-day," she said, handing it to Mrs. Sweeny; "but I forgot it."

Mrs. Sweeny tore it open, and read:

> Won't you come up and have dinner with me Sunday? I'm going to have a real Sunday dinner, at one, like I used to have back home—and I'm going to have pie—and I'd like to have you come, so much.

Whereupon, she began to cry; the girl joined in, and the Boarder became so confused that he paid the taxicab driver a dollar too much.

Queen Caroline's Bracelet

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "Underground Diplomacy," "Omertà," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

The body of a murdered man is found in the private office of Cirillo, an Italian banker of New York. Ralston, who defends Cirillo, discovers the Black Hand back of the tragedy. The body is identified as that of Hispali, an Italian, who had smuggled historical jewels into the country. Cirillo admits that he bought a priceless jewel—a bracelet whose inscription indicates that it was given to Lady Hamilton by Queen Caroline—but he states that he got it not from Hispali, but from Ignazio Conforti, who is missing. Ralston goes to Italy in search of Conforti. He has a letter to Winthrop Clifford in Naples, and they exchange confidences. They meet Alinari, a criminal lawyer, friend of Don Alessandro, a notorious priest, and an evident scoundrel named Lupocino. Ralston is warned by Alinari to leave Italy, but only laughs. Later he is wounded by a dagger-thrust, but is rescued by Police Captain Farloni, who hears their story and tells them that the bracelet bought by Cirillo is one that had been stolen from Salipi, great-grandson of Lady Hamilton, in Naples. Clifford, in the character of Cherubini, an ex-convict from the Ponza Islands, scrapes acquaintance with Left Paw, a bloodthirsty tool of the Camorra. Meanwhile Ralston decides to return to America and leave Clifford to follow the trail.

V.

CLIFFORD'S apartment was in an ancient palazzo on the Strada Chiaia, a rambling old building, which had once been the town residence of a great noble of the Bourbon court. A dozen staircases pierced its mass from the central courtyard about which it was built, and in its later days its roof had come to shelter such a human conglomeration as would only be possible in Naples, where wealth and poverty rub shoulders, and what little there is of virtue tolerates close contact with vice with the good-natured indolence bred by the southern sun. Respectable middle-class families occupied the larger and more expensive apartments facing on the street; between them and the miserable garrets under the tiles—furnaces in summer, and deathly cold in winter—dwelt all sorts and conditions of the people who make up the motley Neapolitan crowd.

The tenants shared the use of the dark hallways and staircases in common, and it required but the slightest of precautions for the American to come and go without observation or comment in the character he so readily assumed. A dozen similar ones found shelter in the old palazzo, where the only reference asked by the landlord's agent was the demonstration of ability to pay the rental in advance.

It was as Cherubini that he left it that evening, and his appearance and manner bore out his statement to Ralston that his disguise was an effective one. His shabby, tight-fitting clothes were Neapolitan—he had purchased them at the Friday rag fair of the Porta Nola. His cravat would have shamed even a Vesuvian sunset in brilliancy, and his champagne-colored shoes ran to the sharpest of sharp points. It was a get-up which would have made most foreigners self-conscious and ridiculous, but Clifford wore it as one born to it; and the half-impudent, half-cringing expression of his face was entirely in character with the indescribable rakish

This story began in the issue of December 15, which can be obtained through any newsdealer. Price fifteen cents.

tilt of the soft black hat and the oily blackness of the hair beneath it.

He was the typical Neapolitan of the class he had chosen to represent, and as he strolled along the crowded Toledo, staring impudently at every woman he passed, no one of the throng gave him the second glance which is invariably bestowed upon the foreigner, who is always a possible source of profit. The *carabinieri,* leisurely patrolling in couples, glanced at him sharply, but with no suspicion that he was not of the class he assumed to be; and none of the innumerable beggars wasted time in pestering him. He passed a dozen people who knew him well in his real character, but who did not suspect his identity; and, leaving the prosperous Western quarters of the city, he plunged into the seething crowd of the Mercato, which received him without question as one of its own.

Alfredo Polisano, *alias* Left Paw, was in bad humor when they met, an hour later, in an inconspicuous little osteria famous for its fried devilfish, and eminently suited, by its retired situation at the back of a dark, ill-smelling court, to the patronage of those who did not seek observation. His particular pal, commonly known as "*Il Granchio,*" or "the Crab," from his peculiar faculty of backing rapidly out of difficult situations, had been unfortunate enough to back into the arms of one pair of *carbinieri* while his eyes were fixed upon another couple, and he was unable to explain the presence in his pocket of a wallet which a German tourist identified as his property. Consequently, he was now in the San Francesco prison, and, as bail is not permitted in Italy, his services were unavailable just at the time when his friend Left Paw had urgent need for them.

"Day after to-morrow, there will be work to do," he grumbled, "and that guy gets pinched with the goods on him! I'm not sure enough of you to give you his part; I've never seen you work, and this sort of a job takes more nerve than making phony money."

Clifford, who had admitted that his residence at the Ponza Islands was due to counterfeiting, considered for a moment before answering. "We might dispose of the evidence against him," he suggested.

Left Paw shook his head sullenly. "That'll be attended to, of course; but it won't get 'the Crab' out of the jug in time to do any good," he said. "Say, it might do for a try-out for you, though. If you can make good on that, say to-morrow night, it'll give the rest of the bunch a line on you. You'll have to work alone; for that's on the side, and the six won't stand for fall money if you get pinched."

Clifford was hardly prepared for such a prompt acceptance of his offer; but he realized that his acceptance must be as quick if he wished to avoid suspicion. It spoke volumes for his adaptability that Left Paw had so readily mistaken him for one of his own kind that first night when they lay together on the pavement of the Piazza del Mercato, and that he had so easily maintained the deception; but his companion would be as quick to become suspicious, and, under the circumstances, he knew that he would not be given the benefit of the doubt, but summarily disposed of.

"I'm game—if it leads anywhere," he said cautiously. "I've got to be sure of what I get out of it; but I'm not worrying about getting pinched. I've never been known to work in that line, and they won't be on the lookout for me."

Left Paw gave a noncommittal grunt. "You can't be sure of what the swine are on the lookout for since that brute Farloni has been on the job!" he said. "I believe he was tipped off the last time, and that other American guy had a hand in it. If Lupocino had let me have my way, we'd have croaked 'em both in the street; but he told me he'd have my heart cut out if we hurt the other one—Clifford's his name."

He was glaring straight into Clifford's face as he spoke, and for a moment the American believed it was a challenge. His hand crept to the knife hilt which he carried conveniently dis-

posed; but his companion wandered on almost incoherently, voicing vague but terrible threats against Farloni and his subordinates.

Clifford would have given much to know why Lupocino had spread his protection about him; but he knew that Left Paw was only a tool, blindly carrying out the orders of the Camorra council, ready to commit murder at its behest, or constrained to curb his natural ferocity in the hope that he might be admitted to the benefits of the powerful organization which practically conferred immunity from outside punishment upon its members.

"You'll get what's coming to you, if you make good," continued his companion, after he had exhausted his maledictions on the *carabinieri*. "We'll frame up the business for that German, and when that's over the other will be easy. Lupocino told me that our man would be out by day after to-morrow; it isn't likely that he'll come into this part of the city, after what he got; but we're to get after him, no matter where he is."

Clifford thought that he understood the significance of the doctor's conference with Lupocino and Don Alessandro which he had witnessed that afternoon, and ventured a question. "What's it all about, Left Paw?" he asked. "What's this American been up to?"

The Italian shrugged his shoulders, and his hands made the common Neapolitan gesture of indifference. "Who knows. What difference does that make to us? Perhaps Lupocino doesn't like the color of his eyes. I only know that if it hadn't been for the cursed pocketbook which turned my knife I shouldn't be eating in a hole like this to-night. Many's the man I've seen jump from rags to riches; there's a dozen that feed now at the swell joints on the Toledo and lie soft of nights that I've seen sleeping on the pavement in the Mercato and fighting for a bone with the dogs in the gutter. They didn't get moved to Easy Street by asking questions, though. They did what they were told, and most of the people they did it to haven't bothered any one since. I'm glad enough of the chance, and if you're not jumping for a slice of it there's plenty that will."

Clifford quickly reassured him. "If I'm sure of the pay I'm game for anything," he said. "I am willing to take your word for that."

Left Paw grinned and winked knowingly. "The pay will come all right—when it's earned," he said confidently. "This isn't my first job for 'em; I was in on frisking Salipi for the sparklers. I delivered the goods, all right; but Carrot-top bilked me and swiped the credit. I'll get even with him later, the beast. I held out the papers."

Clifford found it more difficult to control himself than when he feared that Left Paw suspected his real identity, and the hand with which he raised his wineglass trembled perceptibly.

"Let me see; that must have been while I was at Ponza; but I heard a rumor of it on the Islands," he remarked as carelessly as he could. "Every one said that Carrot-top turned the trick, though."

Left Paw's exclamation of rage was unprintable. "Wait until I've made good and stand even with him!" he snarled viciously. "I'd have done for him if he'd stayed here—but he skipped back to New York with the gang. I can't touch him there until I'm on the inside; but I've got the papers. I'm not forcing the play any. I'm willing to earn my way in, and pay my footing; but when I get there—here, I guess we'd better get down to business!"

Clifford realized that in his eagerness he had been on the point of betraying himself, for Left Paw had said just enough to convince him that Carrot-top was the man whom Ralston was seeking. His random shot was cleverly calculated to make the man before him betray more in his anger, and had been effectual for the moment; but the instinctive caution of the criminal had asserted itself when he realized that his auditor was keenly interested, and stopped his tongue.

"I'll put you wise about the German here to-morrow night," continued Left

Paw quietly. "He'll be at the Gambrinus for dinner, and Amoroso will be able to get next to him. He's a plausible, fatherly old devil, and he'll frame up some proposition that will entice our man where we want him. Then it's up to you to take care of him and yourself. If you pull it off, I'll guarantee that your next day's work will put you where you can laugh at Farloni and his men; if you don't, the laugh is on you."

Clifford accepted the proposition of a double murder as calmly as if the taking of human life was his regular trade.

"I'll take that guarantee—but I'll fix you if you don't make good, just as surely as you'll fix Carrot-top," he said.

Left Paw grinned, and put out his hand. "That's a bargain, then," he said, as Clifford took it. "You turn up here at seven to-morrow night, no matter what happens in the meantime. If I can't come myself, I'll send some one else to meet you and put you wise. There's no use wasting time telling you what will happen if you don't pull straight."

"I don't even have to strain my imagination," answered Clifford, laughing.

Left Paw grinned in response. Then, rising, he threw a gold piece on the table. "Pay the shot and put the change in your pocket," he called, and ducked under the low doorway.

Clifford smiled as he dropped the coin into his pocket, resolved to keep it as a souvenir—the first "blood money" which he had ever earned.

"I can hardly call this evening wasted," he said to himself grimly as he made his way back to his lodgings. "As a starter, I discover that Ralston's surgeon, who stands 'way up in the profession here, is sufficiently in touch with the Camorra to keep it informed of the progress of one of his patients—which is suggestive. My friend Left Paw betrays the fact that Lupocino is solicitous about keeping me out of harm's way—which is something that requires further investigation. He also lets out that Carrot-top, which I have no doubt is a nickname for Conforti, really had possession of the jewels offered to Cirillo—which bears out his statement, but doesn't clear up the reason for the body of Salipi, their rightful owner, being found in his office. That's something for Ralston to work on when he gets back."

To the fact that he was practically pledged to participation in two capital crimes, Clifford barely gave a second thought. The sudden departure of Ralston for America would upset the plans which the Camorra had made to do away with him in Naples, and also the necessity for Clifford to prove his sincerity by removing the evidence against the unfortunate "Crab." At the worst, he could drop the character which he had assumed. This he was loath to do, and he congratulated himself upon being spared this necessity the following morning, when, as Winthrop Clifford, he booked Ralston's steamer passage for the afternoon.

He found the surgeon in attendance, when he called at the hotel, and watched him closely, when Ralston announced that he had received an imperative business summons which obliged him to return at once to New York. The doctor was very evidently surprised; but he offered no objection, and Clifford thought that he even detected an expression of relief on his face.

"You Americans are incorrigible!" he exclaimed laughingly. "Always business before everything else, and I suppose you would not listen to me if I told you that it was unsafe for you to travel."

Ralston smiled, as he looked at the scar of the wound which the surgeon had uncovered for examination. "I might retort, with this evidence before me, that it's a heap more unsafe to remain in Naples," he answered. "It looks all right to me, doctor; so I don't believe I'll have to disobey your injunctions."

"No; I should have let you out to-morrow in any case," said the doctor gravely. "The wound in itself was never dangerous. There is always the

chance of infection; but it was entirely superficial. There will hardly be a sign of it by the time you reach America, and I believe that you are wise to go, aside from business reasons. The voyage will brace you up, and in your native air you will do better than in a Neapolitan summer."

"I don't believe that the heat of the sun is the most dangerous thing in a Neapolitan summer, doctor," remarked Clifford carelessly. "It's a queer city, this Naples of yours."

The doctor looked at him inquiringly. "Yes, a very queer city," he admitted. "I hope that you are not judging it entirely by Mr. Ralston's misadventure; for that, if you will permit me to say so, was entirely due to your own imprudence. It isn't wise for prosperous-looking strangers to visit the slums of any large city at night. Naples is peculiarly dangerous, for human life is held cheaply here. In Paris, London, or any of the other European capitals, a stranger who wandered off the beaten track at night would probably be relieved of his property; but he wouldn't be killed—unless he offered a strenuous resistance. Here, they are more apt to kill first and rob afterward; for there is no capital punishment, and the killing destroys evidence."

"But, doctor, Mr. Ralston has been suspicious that robbery was not the motive for attack upon him," said Clifford quickly. "In America, we are beginning to believe in the existence of what Neapolitans deny—an association of criminals known as the Camorra, which is so powerful that it is practically above the law, and, with Naples as a headquarters, extends wherever Neapolitans emigrate."

The surgeon looked at him for a moment without speaking; then, shrugging his shoulders, busied himself with replacing his instruments in his bag.

"Mr. Clifford, there are some things which it is as well not to discuss," he said quietly. "My interest in Mr. Ralston was at first purely professional; it was my business to heal his wound, not to inquire how he happened to receive it. I have done the professional part; and now, perhaps because of the personal liking which I have conceived for you both, I can only say I am extremely glad that he has decided to return at once to America. From his wound there is not the slightest danger—he can travel in absolute safety—but I could not guarantee an uninterrupted recovery in Naples."

"Doesn't that require a little explanation, doctor?" asked Clifford.

The surgeon snapped his bag shut, and, straightening up, extended his hand, looking Clifford squarely in the eyes.

"No, I do not think you require one, Mr. Clifford; in any case, I could not make it," he replied gravely. "I am myself a Neapolitan. My business is here, my family, and all of my interests are in this city—which, as you said, is a queer one. I hope that our acquaintance here may continue. I trust that you may never need my professional services—I believe that you are wise enough to avoid the necessity."

Clifford took the extended hand and shook it, but with much the same feeling of repulsion he had taken Left Paw's the previous evening.

"I'll try to keep out of trouble," he answered. "I expect the surest way is by remembering the old maxim that evil communications corrupt good manners."

Ralston grinned at him when the doctor had left them. "Then I reckon you've been keeping rotten bad company, for you seem to have been trying to insult the doctor by insinuating that he is a Camorrist," he said.

Clifford nodded. "My companions haven't been very select, but I suspect that he's as bad as any of them, and more to be condemned because he is a man of education," he answered, and then described his experiences of the day and night before.

Ralston listened attentively, and, when he had finished, pointed to a cablegram lying on the table.

"Clifford, I don't believe the whole crowd of thugs and murderers are worth bothering with," he said bitterly.

"I've been staking my pile on Cirillo's innocence, but read that. They've discovered all the rest of the Salipi jewels carefully concealed in his flat."

Clifford confirmed the statement by reading the message. "All the more reason for your returning at once," he said quickly. "If Trenton becomes convinced of his guilt he will bring him to trial at once. I'm not convinced, and I want you to head it off if you can."

"Suppose you do it yourself," suggested Ralston.

Clifford shook his head. "My dear fellow, the moment I make the slightest suggestion to Trenton or the police, my usefulness is ended. I could send them information now which would help in a dozen isolated cases, but I haven't exiled myself to run down individuals. That's police work. I'm waiting until I can land the organization. Its secret service is so good that I shall not take a chance. You can make the best of the information I have given you; and now it's time for you to be leaving for the steamer. I'll put you on board and then watch the disturbance which your unexpected departure creates."

Clifford had not overrated the secret service of the Camorra; he had, perhaps, underrated its complete system of espionage in Naples. He fully expected that the doctor would immediately report Ralston's intended departure, but he did not know that he had been followed to the steamship office that morning, and that within a half hour after he left it was no secret that a passage had been booked on the *Rutanic* for Ralston. He was also ignorant that the sudden change of plan had caused Left Paw to be routed out from the kennel where he slept, and that half a dozen vagabonds had been scouring the Mercato and Municipio quarters trying to locate one Pasquale Cherubini, to whom Left Paw was most anxious to communicate a change of plan.

Therefore it was with a feeling of relief that he drove to the Immacolatella, and boarded the tender with Ralston. He was glad to be freed from the responsibility for his safety, and at liberty to carry on his work in his own way. The steamer lay far out in the stream, the blue peter at the masthead, and heavy black smoke pouring from the funnels; dozens of harbor boats, containing the weeping families of departing emigrants, clustered about it.

Ralston was weak and tired from the exertion, and Clifford helped him on board, waiting until the last minute before sailing, to assure himself that his friend was comfortably placed and cared for. The anchor was already up, and the screws revolving slowly, when he jumped from the side stairs to a harbor boat; but as the great ship gathered momentum and headed for the channel, he would have given much to be able to clamber on board again; for, grinning down at him from the rail of the second cabin deck, was the cruel face of Left Paw.

VI.

Clifford's immediate thought was to warn Ralston of his danger by wireless; but, on inquiry, he found that the *Rutanic* had not yet installed the apparatus, and therefore his first chance of communication would be when the ship touched at Gibraltar. He comforted himself with the reflection that if Left Paw contemplated mischief on shipboard, he would probably take time to get his bearings, and would attempt nothing until the ship was out of the Mediterranean. That, however, he had to acknowledge, was only a guess; for the man was possessed of a certain reckless bravery which would lead him to disregard risk and take the first possible opportunity to carry out his orders. As Winthrop Clifford, there was no chance for him to find out what those orders were; but he remembered Left Paw's injunction to go to the osteria in the Mercato, no matter what might happen; and he went back to his lodgings in the old palazzo to prepare for that rendezvous.

He was surprised to find waiting for him there Ralston's surgeon; but he

was less embarrassed by the meeting than his visitor, who evidently found it difficult to explain the reason for his call.

"I can only take this as a personal compliment—you surely did not anticipate that I should need your professional services so soon, doctor?" he said interrogatively.

The doctor fidgeted uneasily, and hesitated before answering.

"No—but I do not wish anything which may happen to shake your confidence in my professional ability—or honor," he said slowly. The sound of his own voice apparently gave him confidence, and he continued more rapidly, like a man anxious to unburden his mind of trouble:

"I wish to repeat to you the assurance which I gave to Mr. Ralston this morning, that there was absolutely nothing in the condition of his wound which would make traveling dangerous. In fact, it was entirely healed, and nothing but the greatest imprudence on his part could cause any complication."

Clifford looked at him expectantly, but he volunteered nothing further.

"Doctor, I suppose the code of medical ethics is about the same all the world over, and in my experience I have known some members of your profession whose private lives were pretty shady, but who observed that code to the letter," said Clifford. "I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. I believe that you exercised the greatest skill in treating Ralston, and the result of that treatment was perfectly satisfactory. I can't say as much for your conduct outside of the sick room, for I have every reason to believe that you were not entirely loyal to your patient's interests."

The doctor's face flushed, but his voice was steady enough when he answered. "You will have to explain that, Mr. Clifford," he said curtly.

"In other words, tell you all I know?" retorted Clifford. "All right; it isn't much. Only that I saw you in consultation with two men who are apparently fairly well known here. Captain Farloni has even suggested that they are powerful in a certain society of which we spoke and which Ralston suspected was instrumental in giving him that wound. Neither of them appeared to be in need of medical advice, and, to be perfectly frank, I believed that you were running with the hare, and hunting with the hounds. I'll go even further. I believe that you have seen them again since Ralston's sudden change in plan."

"I have, and that is the reason I am here," acknowledged the doctor defiantly. "I wish to qualify that, however, by saying that I have only just come from them; that I did not see them until after the *Rutanic* had sailed. The meeting was entirely accidental, and nothing which I said led to——" He stopped in confusion, conscious that he had admitted more than he intended.

"Led to the change of plans which they were forced to make on account of his change," said Clifford quickly, completing the sentence for him. "Doctor, why don't you give it up? You're out of your class when you mix with that bunch."

The doctor threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Clifford was sufficiently tactful to let well enough alone and remain silent, and he busied himself in looking out into the hallway for possible eavesdroppers.

The doctor straightened up and looked at him curiously when he closed and locked the door. "That is almost an answer to your question, Mr. Clifford," he said bitterly. "Call it fear, if you like, but it isn't fear of personal punishment. Perhaps I'm paying the penalty for youthful follies; but pay them I must. Things looked differently to me here when I was a young medical student, bubbling over with the vitality of youth, anxious for excitement and adventure and ignorant that in forming certain associations I was forging chains for myself which could never be removed. I entered into things for play, but found tragedies beneath the surface—not the least of them that I am, as you say, out of my class. But there is no help for it. The earth is

not wide enough to hide me if I attempt to fly away from it. There is no hand powerful enough to shield me and mine if I defy it. You can put me in the class with the others you have known who drew the distinction between personal and professional ethics. I have prostituted myself, but not my profession. In the sick room my loyalty is to my patient; outside of it I live as decently as circumstances permit. There is no profit to me in that other connection; for, as far as possible, I have repudiated it. Its obligations I must bear as long as I live. I can tell no more."

"You can tell me all of the reasons for your visit to me, doctor," persisted Clifford. "It was not merely to reiterate your assurance of this morning that you came. Have you reason to believe that danger threatens Ralston?"

The doctor shook his head obstinately. "I can tell you nothing. I know nothing of what may happen on board the *Rutanic*. I hope that Mr. Ralston may have a safe voyage. But if I were in his place, I should wait at Gibraltar for another ship."

"You have told me enough to make me apprehensive—not enough to be of service," Clifford objected, when the doctor rose to go. "Perhaps if I tell you what I already know, it may give you confidence in me."

The doctor raised his hands in violent protest. "Tell me nothing, Clifford!" he exclaimed. "I wish to know nothing more of it. I suspect that you are playing with fire; but my suspicions are my own, and definite knowledge I should be forced to share. Open the door, if you please. I have incurred a certain amount of risk in coming here at all; it doesn't lessen the danger to any one if I remain."

Clifford unlocked the door, and stood with his hand on the knob. "Then I think the game was hardly worth the candle," he said irritably. "I can't see that your coming has done much good; and, if I am playing with fire, it is only apt to call attention to it. I'll give you a little legal tip, doctor. There may be no way for you to wriggle out of the contract which you claim is so oppressive; but there is always a chance to make it so unprofitable for the other party that they will be glad to release you."

The doctor shook his head, and motioned for him to stand away from the door. "That sometimes happens, but there is only one method of release," he said grimly. "There are others dependent upon me, and I'm not prepared for that kind of release." He glanced quickly about the hallway before stepping out of the room; and Clifford shook his head disconsolately as he closed and locked the door after him.

"It isn't an easy proposition that I'm facing," Clifford reflected, as he pulled Cherubini's clothes from their place of concealment. "I believe that chap is sincere. He regrets the entanglement of his student days, but he can't get away from it. In a statement which he could dictate in ten minutes he could give enough facts to break the back of the organization—facts which it will take years and the best sort of luck for me to dig up. I suppose Trenton would put down his refusal to speak to fear. Perhaps the doctor believes that is what seals his mouth; but it isn't. It's heredity. It's the curse of being born in the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies."

He stood in front of his glass, vigorously brushing his hair to conform to the glossiness and arrangement beloved of the Neapolitans; and almost unconsciously—so thoroughly was his heart in the game—his expression changed until it was Cherubini's face which he saw reflected.

"And, by Jove, I'm beginning to understand the feeling!" he exclaimed aloud. "It's contagious, as well as hereditary. I believe that if I lived the life they lead, breathed the mysterious atmosphere of this old palazzo for another year, and could forget my personal score against the brotherhood, I should become as good a Camorrist as the best of 'em."

To any one of his American friends, ignorant of Italy and its influences, his reflections would have seemed absurd

and ridiculous; but, nevertheless, there was in them a large portion of common sense.

By heredity he was straight American; but, up to the time when he entered an American university, his life had been spent in Italy, wandering from north to south with the seasons, receiving his education in company with Italian boys, and that broader education which the independence of the American permits on the streets of Italian cities. Before he knew a word of English, he had spoken the Sicilian *dialetto,* which is unintelligible to most Italians—the crisp, abbreviated Neapolitan, which requires the aid of expressive gesture and pantomime to accent it. In those dialects and gestures he had had no formal teaching. He had learned them unconsciously in his boyhood from his playmates, the grooms, the house servants; and with them he had absorbed the folk-lore of the people, the tolerance of much of which is abhorrent to the ordinary Anglo-Saxon, who is reared in sterner climate and surroundings.

From infancy he had been familiar with the traditions of the Mafia and the Camorra. He had seen their influence, much of it cruel and brutal, oftentimes merciful and beneficial, in the lives of the people about him. Then he had accepted it as a matter of course, just as all of his acquaintances did, and had joined in their admiration of the swaggering brigands of the hills as American boys made heroes of the James and Younger outlaws.

It was entirely within the range of possibilities that had he become a student at the University of Naples, instead of going to America, he would have fraternized, at least, with those who were active in the Camorra affairs. Love of excitement and adventure might well have led him more deeply into it, for it is in the universities that the members of the High Camorra are recruited, as the slums of the Mercato and Municipio fill the ranks of the Low.

Clifford had entered actively into the new life of his American university. He had played no mean part in college athletics, and had been chosen for the most exclusive of the fraternities. During those busy, crowded years and the succeeding ones at the law school and in a New York office he had become aggressively American.

Chance and a woman's eyes had caused him to become involved in a conspiracy of the Black Hand—so deeply involved that he realized what a menace the transplanted Italian secret society had become. It was no small sacrifice which he made when he voluntarily relinquished a career which promised to be brilliant in New York and went abroad with the determination to study the parent organizations that his knowledge might aid in exterminating their vicious offspring in America. But again, as he swaggered along the Toledo in the character of Cherubini, he realized that it would have been most difficult to find another so well fitted for the task.

Clifford was playing for a big stake, and it had been no part of his scheme to aid in the bringing to justice of individual criminals. Trenton, the district attorney of New York, who was the only person cognizant of his mission, kept him supplied with such details of Black Hand crimes as were brought to his office; but Clifford studied each one of them only for the possible light which it might throw upon the methods of the organization.

The arrival of Ralston in Naples had caused him to depart temporarily from his routine; but if the Cirillo case had not presented the unusual feature of the bracelet which linked it with the very origin of the Camorra as a society of violence and a political power, he would have devoted no more of his attention to it than to the others which Trenton had reported to him.

He had not minimized the danger to himself when he started on his investigations. He soon discovered that, as a broad matter of policy, the Camorra and its allied foreign branches avoided, so far as possible, contact with foreigners; satisfying itself with the tremendous revenues which it was able to

raise from Italians by blackmail and intimidation. That policy did not imply, however, that the society would not fight outsiders who attacked it; and he knew that the prompt attempt to kill Ralston was due to his effort to penetrate the mysteries of the Camorra in defense of his client—a man whom he believed the society intended to sacrifice.

He saw that Ralston was in the very gravest danger; but, living with the sword above his own head suspended by a hair, he accepted the other man's peril as part of the day's work, and because of it he had no intention of relinquishing his own efforts, or bringing them to naught by treating with the Camorra for his safety. Ralston must take his chance, even as he did; and Clifford felt instinctively that more than one valuable life would be sacrificed before the Black Hand would be stamped out in America.

His own immunity he attributed entirely to the fact that as Winthrop Clifford he had gone quietly about his investigations in a line which would cause no suspicion. He had studied the old archives of the Bourbon reign, and he had talked with many of the old Neapolitans who still remembered its traditions; skillfully eliciting such information as they could give him concerning the methods and discipline of the old secret societies without betraying his interest in their direct successors. He had carefully avoided communication with the police officials, knowing that aside from the *carabinieri* they were, to say the least, in sympathy with the Camorra.

By a fortunate chance he had renewed a boyhood acquaintance with the real Cherubini—a young Florentine, who had forsaken unremunerative painting to exercise his artistic talents in counterfeiting bank notes. On his return from serving his sentence at the Ponza Islands, the counterfeiter was anxious to emigrate to South America for a fresh start in life, and Clifford had advanced him sufficient money to evade the emigration restrictions by going first to England, receiving in return a full history of his life in the prison and his papers of identification, on which were indorsed a full record of his crime and conviction.

With those papers, and an intimate knowledge of prison life, Clifford had assumed the character of the convict to pursue his investigations in the slums of Naples, assured that his record would soon bring him in active contact with the Low Camorra. Prisoners at Ponza are kept in solitary confinement, so that he had no fear of the deception being discovered by other jail birds; but he was surprised at the easy credulity of his fellow vagabonds, who received him without question and treated with a certain respect a man capable of venturing into the higher branches of criminality.

He was hardly prepared, however, for the abject servility of the young fellow he found awaiting his coming at the osteria—a youngster precocious in crime, whom he had known as a satellite of Left Paw, and whose specialty, he had been told, was the filching of the hand luggage of careless travelers.

He addressed Clifford as *"Maestro,"* and remained standing and uncovered while he rattled off his message—regrets from Left Paw that he had been unable to find him during the day, and a request that he accompany the messenger to a rendezvous, where he would receive instructions concerning further employment.

Clifford looked suspiciously at the messenger, commonly known as "Peppo, the Rat." He was a furtive, cringing rascal, dwarfed physically by early neglect and lack of food; warped and perverted mentally by evil associations until he had no perception of honesty, and raised above the level of the brute only by the possession of a certain shrewd cunning. Questioning only served to bring to his face an expression of vacuous stupidity, and he took refuge behind that when pressed as to what had become of Left Paw and the identity of the person who was to deliver the instructions.

"I have a cab waiting, *eccellenza,* and a driver whom I know very well,"

he repeated again and again, in answer to a dozen different questions. "It is far away, but the *maestro* will go in comfort, like a *signore*."

He refused to understand that anything but fear of discomfort made Cherubini hesitate to accompany him, and could not be induced to answer a single question until Clifford flatly declined to go without further assurance than his unsupported word. Then he broke into whining protestations; crying that he would be punished for failure, and that Cherubini would bitterly regret his refusal.

Clifford motioned to him to be quiet, and in his impatience emphasized that gesture with a hand raised threateningly; but Peppo's hand slipped to his knife hilt, and Clifford realized that even this scum of a Neapolitan gutter would resent the indignity of a blow with a stiletto thrust. It served to quiet him, however, and Clifford did some rapid thinking. He had suspected a trap—that the boy was to lead him to some place where he would be quietly disposed of. A minute's reflection, however, convinced him that he could be in no more dangerous place than this little osteria, and that he had everything to gain and nothing to lose by taking the chance.

"All right, I'll go with you," he said. "You'll be the first one to get hurt, if there's any funny business."

Peppo's relief was evident, and he led the way quickly, as if fearing that Cherubini might change his mind; but he objected strenuously when Clifford motioned for him to take the seat beside him in the cab which was in waiting.

"It is not proper, *eccellenza,* that I should sit with you; I will sit on the box and direct the driver where——"

"You will sit in here with me," interrupted Clifford decidedly, and he effectually squelched further argument by catching the boy by the collar and lifting him in; taking the precaution to pin his arms to his side as he did it. Before releasing him, he slipped Peppo's knife from its sheath, and as the cab started he showed it to him.

"You're too handy with this, my boy," he said grimly. "I'll return it to you, if there is any trouble, point first; so, if you wish to change the cabman's orders, you'd better do so right away."

"He knows where to take us," answered Peppo sullenly. "I'm only carrying out my orders."

"Orders from whom?" demanded Clifford sharply; but Peppo refused to break his obstinate silence. Clifford desisted from questioning, but relaxed nothing of his vigilance; and, as the cab left the better lighted streets and approached the suburbs, he reminded his companion with a significant gesture that treachery would be dangerous.

It was hardly reassuring, after driving for a half hour through squalid suburbs, to have the cab draw up in front of a burial ground; but it was evidently their destination, for Peppo motioned to him to get out. He obeyed, keeping a firm grasp of Peppo's arm with his left hand as he guided him to a small house adjoining the high cemetery wall.

Peppo gave a peculiar series of knocks, and Clifford drew back hesitatingly as the door opened; but he could hardly restrain a cry of triumph when he saw, silhouetted against the bright lamplight from within, the powerful figure of Don Alessandro Vitello.

The priest stood aside to let them pass, and, after a sharp glance at Clifford, made a sign of dismissal to his companion. Peppo hesitated a moment, looking imploringly at Clifford, and the latter smiled as he handed back the confiscated stiletto. Peppo turned to go; but a word from Don Alessandro stopped him.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked sternly.

Peppo shrugged his shoulders, and Clifford gave a rather humorous description of the scene in the restaurant which had led him to relieve Peppo of his weapon. He made light of it; but at the recital the priest's small eyes fairly blazed with anger. He seized

Peppo by the collar and shook him violently.

"You worm! You dared to threaten a man to whom I had sent you with a message!" he exclaimed angrily.

Peppo started to whimper an excuse, but the priest cut it short with a blow which sent him reeling to the corner of the room, where he sank half unconscious to the floor. Don Alessandro opened the door and picking up the boy without apparent exertion threw him into the roadway.

The whole thing had been so sudden that Clifford was fairly stunned; but, after locking the door, the priest turned to him and extended his hand, nothing in his expression indicating that he thought the proceeding out of the ordinary.

"Discipline before all, Cherubini," he said calmly. "Peppo is stupid, and the only punishment which would make a permanent impression upon him is physical pain. I think it will be a long time before he again forgets himself. Now that I have disposed of him, I suppose that introductions are in order. You, I know, are Cherubini; I am Don Alessandro Vitello, curé of the Campo Santo of Poggioreale."

"I have heard of Don Alessandro," answered Clifford formally. "I hardly supposed that he would have known me."

The priest looked at him curiously and shrugged his shoulders. "Strange information comes to a priest. I have heard of you before, and I have known of your peculiar accomplishments. It would be sinful to waste talents such as yours. I have need of them, and there is no use in allowing you to do the menial work for which we have a thousand tools."

Clifford looked at him inquiringly. "And the pay?" he asked.

"Better than for the other work you expected to do," replied Don Alessandro, smiling. "There will be no difficulty about arranging terms."

Clifford nodded acceptance; for there was that in Don Alessandro's face which boded ill for the man who refused him.

VII.

"There is no use in wasting time—which is a precious commodity with me just now, Cherubini," said Don Alessandro, motioning to his guest to take a comfortable chair. "A most important piece of work has been inexcusably bungled, and it is my duty to see that the resulting damage is repaired. To do that I have need of just the talents which you possess; for I have seen samples of your work, and it was excellent."

"Not good enough to keep me out of trouble, however," said Clifford deprecatingly; for he feared that his inability to do Cherubini's work might lead to the detection of the imposture. "I was pinched before I realized any profit, and I swore that I should never play that game again."

The priest smiled and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"It is a privilege of my holy office to grant relief from troublesome vows, and I shall be glad to release you," he said cynically. "Your failure was due to lack of intelligent coöperation; you should have limited your share to the manufacturing. I have heard it admitted that the paper which you used was the best imitation that has ever been discovered; and, if you have not lost your skill, the task I have for you should be an easy one."

Clifford watched him eagerly as he took from a drawer of the table a packet of papers, and spread them out. They were tattered at the edges, and yellow from age, and the little writing which was visible was faded almost to illegibility.

"I must have this paper, which is more than a century old, so perfectly duplicated that there will be no chance of discovery," continued Don Alessandro. "That is the principal thing; for I am sure that there will be no difficulty in imitating the writing and the ink. I can give you any amount of documents to study the peculiarities from, so that it will be only a matter of study and practice; but the paper presents greater difficulties."

Clifford picked up one of the documents and examined it carefully without opening it.

"Yes, it will be most difficult," he admitted. "Something entirely out of my line, I'm afraid."

The priest scowled and shook his head. "It will be time enough to tell me that when you have made an effort and failed," he said curtly. "I tell you that I must have it."

Clifford looked doubtfully at the faded writing. "If you have so many of these papers, some of them are probably relatively unimportant," he suggested. "I might be able to bleach out the original writing, and use the identical paper. It is of excellent quality, and would stand a lot of treatment."

Don Alessandro's great hand slapped his knee and caused a report like a pistol shot.

"Per Bacco, I knew I was making no mistake!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "You would certainly have been wasted at bravo's work! You can have a bushel of them to experiment with; for my lady was a voluminous writer."

Clifford could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise, and he opened the paper which he held in his hand—ostensibly to examine the ink, in reality to catch a glimpse of the chirography.

"I should hardly have thought this a woman's handiwork," he said; for there was nothing feminine about the large, scraggly penmanship.

The priest laughed and rubbed his great hands together unctuously. "Ah, my boy, but what a woman!" he exclaimed. "As beautiful and as cruel as a tigress; the face and form of a Venus; the subtlety of a Machiavelli, the conscience and morals of a Lucretia Borgia."

In spite of his priestly vestments, Don Alessandro gloated admiringly over the picture of depravity which he drew, and Clifford's question as to the identity of the woman was perfunctory, for he knew there could have been but one.

"Why, it was my Lady Hamilton, of course!" the priest answered. "The woman who came from nowhere to rule kings, queens, and admirals—the woman who used her charm and beauty to bend men to do her will; who taught even the Bourbons cruelty, and made Lord Nelson forget his wife, his country, and his honor."

Clifford's fingers fairly itched to get at the papers of which Don Alessandro spoke, and, although he knew nothing of the technique of the task for which he had volunteered, he was willing to take the chance of discovery for what those papers might reveal. He was shrewd enough, however, to conceal his interest in the personality of the writer and the contents of the papers, and to convey the impression that it was only the quality and the ink which he was studying.

"It would be better if we could have them all together before we make a choice," he suggested. "You have the others here?"

The priest nodded, and lighted a candle. "Come with me," he said.

Clifford followed him through a narrow, vaulted passage, and at the end waited while his guide inserted a heavy key in the lock of a massive door. That door opened noiselessly, and admitted them into a medium-sized room with a heavy arched ceiling, and narrow windows piercing the tremendously thick walls far above the ground.

One side of the room was occupied by a heavy oak wardrobe; the other sides had shelves supporting row after row of large ledgers in black leather bindings. Each had stamped on it a date, and Clifford noticed that they were arranged in chronological order; the earliest one more than two centuries old.

"This is the sacristy of the cemetery chapel," said the priest, as he lighted a half-dozen candles in an antique bracket of bronze. "It is also something else. For a hundred years and more my predecessors have been *ex officio* fathers confessor and recording secretaries for a very honorable society."

He locked the communicating door to the chapel while Clifford examined

curiously the rows of books which contained the death records of generations of Neapolitans—grim reminders of the vanity of earthly pomp and power, ghastly memorials of the terrible visitations of plague and pestilence which had so often devastated the city.

Don Alessandro smiled as he nodded toward them. "They are as instructive because of what they conceal as because of their contents," he said. "There is many an entry in them which would suggest nothing to the ordinary reader, but which has a strange significance to those who know. I shall show you one or two later; but, first, our business."

He placed his hand upon the back of one of the older volumes, and Clifford started forward to assist him, for he thought the entire row was about to fall to the floor. The priest waved him back, and he saw that the shelf which carried them was itself moving out; supported by some concealed mechanism which worked noiselessly.

In the wall behind were two small iron doors. One of these Don Alessandro unlocked, revealing an iron-lined cavity in the thick wall, filled to the top with bundles of papers and documents.

"There could be no safer depository for secrets," he said, with a grim smile on his lips, as he selected two or three of the packets. "Neapolitans are so busy living that they have neither time nor inclination to disturb the records of the dead. No one comes from choice to this building, and my hand alone touches these papers." He glanced at the indorsements of the packets, and untied the string which bound one of them.

"This will answer our purpose," he continued, carrying them nearer to the candles. "They are of little interest, I believe, and they are written in her barbarous native language, which I do not understand. Look them over and see if you think you can remove the traces of the writing."

Clifford took one of the papers and studied it attentively; but had Dan Alessandro known that his eyes were greedily devouring the substance of the communication, which was a personal letter from Lady Hamilton to one of her tools, he would not have waited so patiently, and the smile of approval would have faded from his face.

For a moment after he finished reading, Clifford did not dare to trust himself to speak. He held the paper against the light, glanced at it from all angles, and passed it carefully between his finger tips. All the time, the words of it were dancing before his eyes—the savage demand for a human life, the stern injunction that Domenico Cirillo should be hurried to the gallows without an opportunity of public speech.

"This paper, you tell me, is of little consequence?" he said inquiringly. "It will not matter if it should be mutilated or destroyed in my experiments?"

Don Alessandro nodded, and pointed to the others. "If they possessed ten times their value, I should not hesitate to risk them all on the chance of success," he answered. "I must have those papers; they will be of a million times the use of all this rubbish."

While he spoke, Clifford was examining the other papers in the packet—each of them written by Lady Hamilton in English, every one throwing light on some tragic event which made up the history of that grewsome year 1799, when her influence had raised the rabble of the Neapolitan slums to exterminate all that was best in the city, and replace on it the yoke of the Bourbon despotism.

"These will be enough to start with," he said carelessly, gathering them up and starting to place them in his pocket. "I do not anticipate a great deal of difficulty."

Don Alessandro stepped quickly forward, and one powerful hand was laid on Clifford's shoulder, while the other took the papers.

"No, no, my dear Cherubini," he said quietly. "These papers do not leave this room. This shall be your laboratory; I shall be your assistant. I have selected these particular specimens be-

cause they are in English, and their contents can convey nothing to you. You can work here undisturbed; but not one line of writing, nor one scrap of paper, passes that door."

Clifford relinquished the papers, and faced him angrily. "Don Alessandro, you have voluntarily trusted me so far; you have no reason to mistrust me!" he protested. "This is delicate work. It requires peculiar skill and manipulation—to say nothing of a fairly complete chemical equipment."

The priest smiled cynically. "Yes, Cherubini, I trusted you—as I do all men—just as far as necessity required, and not a hair's breadth farther. Before I decided to trust you so far, I considered having you kidnapped and carried to a quiet place that I know of, to do the work I required in ignorance of your real employer. I decided, for reasons of my own, that this was the easier method; but I have told you the conditions under which you must work. You may congratulate yourself upon my decision; for the end of the other plan would have been problematical—for you—and this, if your work is satisfactory, holds out the promise of reward."

"Do I understand that I am a prisoner here?" demanded Clifford. Don Alessandro's great hands rose in protest as he shook his head and smiled. "Not at all, not at all!" he exclaimed. "I shall invite you to partake of the poor hospitality of my house so often and for so long as suits your convenience and your work. You will find there nothing of the prison, and, I may add, little of the rigor to which so many priestly households are subjected. I have certain dispensations; the nature of my work requires a few worldly indulgences."

For a moment, Clifford hesitated. To accept that hospitality meant the promise of intimacy with the very men he wished to study, and the opportunity to delve in those old Camorra records, under the pretense of experimentation; but he knew that a few hours would suffice to expose his utter ignorance of the work for which he had volunteered. In that moment of hesitation, Don Alessandro had stepped to the wardrobe, and, throwing it open, revealed a jumble of retorts and chemical appliances and several rows of bottles.

"I have experimented, myself, in a humble way," continued the priest. "I believe that you will find here all that it is necessary. I have not succeeded; for I have not your knowledge."

Clifford did a lot of serious thinking, as he examined the apparatus, of which he knew nothing, and read the labels on the bottles, which were as unintelligible to him as if they had been expressed in Sanskrit, instead of chemical formulæ.

"I don't wonder that you failed, considering the quality of the materials with which you have been working," he said contemptuously, after leisurely uncorking a half-dozen of the bottles and sniffing at their contents. "All of this stuff is of inferior quality, saturated with impurities, and unfit for use. It is a poor selection, and I should think it would have destroyed the paper, as well as the ink."

"It did," admitted the priest ruefully, and Clifford gained confidence from his lucky shot. "Sometimes it went to pulp, sometimes it became so discolored and filled with holes that it was absolutely useless."

Clifford nodded wisely, and pointed to a bottle which had obviously been largely employed.

"That acid would eat holes in armor plate," he assented. "I can't work with this stuff, *padre*."

Don Alessandro nodded, and closed the doors of the closet.

"I'll have it all thrown out to-morrow, and you can make a list of what you require," he said. "I can obtain everything so that you can get to work to-morrow night."

Clifford saw that the priest had absolute confidence in his knowledge, and ventured a laugh.

"You couldn't get it in a month of Sundays; and, long before you got it together, the police would be ransacking Italy for that dangerous counter-

feiter, Cherubini!" he exclaimed. "See here, *padre;* the success of my work depended upon just this process, and it took me years to perfect it. I didn't imitate banknote paper. I bleached the ink from notes of a small denomination, doing it so skillfully that not a trace remained, and then printed from plates engraved from the larger bills. I was obliged to employ many rare chemicals—things which are so seldom used that inquiry for them would at once arouse the suspicion of the police, and every *carabinieri* in Italy would be put on my track."

Don Alessandro listened attentively, and there was a frown on his face when Clifford finished.

"We must have those chemicals just the same!" exclaimed the priest. "I can keep you concealed, with all of Italy looking for you."

"Don Alessandro, I've had one taste of solitary confinement, and I don't want another. I'll do this work for you; but I must do it my own way. I have a full supply of the materials which I used before my arrest; they did not fall into the hands of the police, and it will be a simple matter for me to obtain them without exciting suspicion. If I attempted to buy them, the dealers would notify the police; and, while your concealment might prevent me from falling into their hands, it would virtually mean exchanging one form of imprisonment for another."

The priest looked at him with eyes which seemed to pierce through him. But Clifford was prepared and met his scrutiny without flinching. "You can tell me the hiding place, and I shall send for your materials," said Don Alessandro suspiciously.

Clifford made a determined gesture of refusal. "I shall tell no one," he said positively. "I do not know the nature of the document which you wish me to forge; but it is apparently of great importance to you. If you can trust me with that secret, you can trust me further. It will take me two or three days to get the things, and I tell you frankly that I shall be on my guard against espionage. If I suspect that I am followed, I shall do nothing; for I could not distinguish between friends and foes, and the trailers might be from the police."

There was no question of Clifford's sincerity, and the priest was impressed; although he had no idea of the real cause of it. Clifford knew that his only chance was in gaining time before he was put to the test; time to acquire information if he found it absolutely necessary to use it; the opportunity to choose a more favorable battle ground than this lonely sacristy if it came to a fight.

In his determination, Don Alessandro read only the natural suspicion of the marked criminal, and, while he was mistaken in the cause, he was sufficiently a judge of human nature to appreciate that no argument would change it. He nodded, and made a gesture of assent; but it was a grudging one, and his face settled into hard, cruel lines.

"I am not afraid of your playing the traitor," he said, and his tone was a menace. "If you should betray what you have learned here, it could do no harm to any living man but yourself; but, lest you should be tempted, I will show you something which may strengthen your fidelity."

He took one of the newer registers from a shelf, and turned over the leaves, pointing successively to three entries. Each recorded an interment in the cemetery, and in each case the cause of death was ascribed to violence.

"Study those at your leisure," he said significantly, as he unlocked the door leading to the chapel.

He left Clifford alone for perhaps ten minutes, and then returned with a packet of papers in his hand.

"Only three of these refer to those cases," he said grimly, as he spread them out.

Clifford looked at them and saw that they were concise records of investigations of charges against some one; but not a name was mentioned. In place of names were crudely drawn symbols —a hat, crossed daggers, an arrow, a snake, and a dozen others. At the bot-

tom of each was the same sign—a skull surmounted with a cross, and beneath it the word "Firmato," and a representation of a brigand's hat for a signature.

"All of those sentences were executed," said Don Alessandro. "Some of the persons are buried here. Some of them fled, to die in New Orleans, or San Francisco, or elsewhere—this is a small world and easily girdled."

"I understand," answered Clifford quietly.

"I should advise you to remember," said the priest, as he extinguished the extra candles and led the way back to his house.

Ten minutes later, Clifford was walking back to the city in the dawn, his brain in a whirl, and the feeling strong within him that he had escaped from the very jaws of death. He knew that Don Alessandro would not have hesitated to kill him, if he had had the least suspicion, and the strain he had been under was tremendous. He had not the slightest intention of sacrificing the opportunity which chance had thrown in his way to get at the Camorra records; but he could not restrain a little shudder as he remembered the grewsome ones which the priest had exhibited to terrify him into fidelity.

"I suppose Ralston would laugh at me if he could hear me say it; but, just the same, behind the daggers which executed those sentences was the guiding hand of Emma, Lady Hamilton."

VIII.

Absorbed in his thoughts, Clifford paid little heed to his personal safety as he made his way homeward, neglecting the obvious precaution of watching to see if he were followed. He walked for a good half hour before finding a cab, and the horse which drew it went at snail's pace—so slowly that Peppo, the Rat, nursing a swollen and discolored face, and a heart full of hatred for the man whom he believed to be responsible for the blow which caused it, had little difficulty in keeping the rickety vehicle in sight.

Clifford, unconscious of the scrutiny of the ratlike eyes, paid and dismissed the cabman at his own door, and went through the narrow halls to his own apartment. Carefully concealing his Neapolitan costume, he threw himself on the bed for the short sleep which he might get before the servant arrived to prepare his morning coffee.

Peppo, the Rat, cautiously slipping through the building, knife in hand, disregarded his doorway—for Cherubini would undoubtedly occupy one of the squalid garrets under the tiles. His search proved fruitless, and he returned to the courtyard to wait, with the supreme patience born of vengeance, for his victim to come out.

He was there for nearly three hours before a footstep which he thought familiar warned him to be on the alert and go to meet Cherubini on the dimly lighted stairway. He shrank back when he found himself confronted by the American, and muttered an excuse as he flattened himself against the wall to let him pass. Clifford recognized him, and that recognition made it no easy matter to pass on, carelessly whistling a popular air and swinging his stick; for he felt that any moment the young thief might stab him in the back.

"If I should happen to meet one Pasquale Cherubini, I should warn him to sleep with one eye open," he said to himself, when he reached the street doorway without molestation, and realized that Peppo had not discovered his identity. "I'm afraid his usefulness is over until that young vagabond is disposed of."

The encounter had startled him; but now that it was safely over, he was glad that it had happened, for it gave him renewed assurance that his double identity was not suspected. He guessed the truth—that Peppo was simply trying to exact a private vengeance. He had noted the bruised face, and he knew that even the humblest Neapolitan would never rest under the indignity of a blow until it had been paid for in blood.

Don Alessandro, who had struck him, was too dangerous to be meddled

with, but he realized that Peppo would never show that discolored face to his companions in the Mercato until he could also exhibit his stiletto bearing a deeper stain as proof that he had exacted payment.

Clifford did not underestimate his danger; but, until he again appeared as Cherubini, he felt he was safe, and, for the moment, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

He had decided that the information which he might get from the records of the Camorra, of which Don Alessandro was the custodian, made it imperative for him to run the chance of discovery; and to minimize that chance it was necessary for him to acquire technical chemical knowledge of which he was ignorant.

He remembered several legal cases in his New York experience which convinced him that the bleaching of the ink on the documents was perfectly feasible; for, in those cases, a will and books had been tampered with in just that way—the original writing removed with chemicals to permit of falsification. Consequently, while Don Alessandro believed that Cherubini was traveling northward to obtain from their hiding place the chemicals necessary to do his work, that notorious character had returned to the land of myth, and Winthrop Clifford was working assiduously in a laboratory of the university under the tuition of a skillful chemist for whose entire time he was paying a most extravagant sum.

He worked early and late, showing an energy which surprised his Italian instructor, and a quick grasp of the subject which gave him an increased respect for American mental training. Clifford was naturally deft with his fingers, so that the delicate manipulations necessary were easily mastered, and he found the chemical processes so simple that he was amazed that Don Alessandro had had such ill success.

But no matter how early Clifford might leave the old palazzo or how late he might return, he always saw Peppo, the Rat, crouched in a corner of the courtyard or loitering in the street before it. The marks of the bruises grew fainter, but the small black eyes burned none the less vindictively from their long vigil, and Clifford knew that he could never hope to leave his rooms in the character of Cherubini without a contest which would leave one or the other on the ground.

In an American city, the young rascal would have been promptly picked up as a suspicious character, and he would never have been permitted to loiter for an hour; but the tolerance of vagrancy and mendicancy in Naples is greater than in any other city, and hundreds of vagabonds of his class infest its streets, subsisting on the proceeds of beggary and petty theft, and never interfered with unless they are detected red-handed in robbery or violence. A word to Captain Farloni would have caused his arrest; but Clifford was chary of communicating with the authorities, and averse to calling for assistance while he was concealing from them information which they would have given much to obtain.

"He would be small loss; but I don't want to be forced to kill the little beast," he said to himself, as he went to his apartment. He was tired from a long day in the laboratory, and knew that on the following evening, at the latest, he should have to reappear as Cherubini—for that was the limit he had put upon his absence to Don Alessandro. He was trying to think of some methods of eluding Peppo's vigilance, as he lighted his lamp and saw on the table a telegram which had arrived during his absence.

A moment later, his scruples had disappeared, and he would not have hesitated to kill a dozen Camorra tools; for the message was from the steamship agents in Gibraltar, announcing that Ralston, a cabin passenger on the *Rutanic,* had died at sea from hemorrhage caused by the reopening of a partly healed wound in the chest.

Clifford had known plenty of tragedy since he had started his investigations; but never had it seemed so near and personal, and it staggered him. It seemed incredible that Ralston should

be dead; but, as he remembered the cruel face of Left Paw, which had leered at him from the departing steamer, he could not doubt—nor could he mistake the real reason for the opening of that wound which was completely healed.

The doctor's visit had a new significance for him, now. The devilish ingenuity which had planned so subtle a murder was another proof of his own danger. In the light of what he knew, he could reconstruct the tragedy which had occurred on the steamer, where Ralston, entirely unsuspicious of danger, would not be on his guard.

Clifford knew that his cabin had opened on the promenade deck, and, in the sweltering nights of midsummer on the Mediterranean, the door would undoubtedly be left open for ventilation. He could see Left Paw, after careful examination during the day, craftily sneaking along the deserted deck in the middle of the night, gliding into the cabin, and stealthily watching his chance to strike the sleeping man. By accident or design he had stabbed him in the line of the old wound—so deeply that instantaneous death prevented outcry. Ralston had been recommended to the ship's surgeon as a man recovering from a recent wound, and the discovery of his body in the morning would at once suggest that as the cause of death.

The death of a passenger on shipboard is never advertised. It is hidden, so far as possible, from his fellow voyagers, and in the absence of suspicion of violence the post-mortem investigation would be a most cursory one. Left Paw would drop back into obscurity in the crowded second cabin; Ralston's death would be noted on the ship's log, ordinarily his body would be consigned to the sea, carrying with it all proof of foul play, and insuring immunity to the murderer.

Clifford appreciated that the crime could never be brought home to Left Paw, even if he should disregard his invariable rule and cable to have the man arrested on his arrival in New York. The deed had been done on the high seas and on a vessel carrying a foreign flag; so that investigation would not be made in New York, and interference on his part at the moment would only add to the ever present risk of betrayal of his own sufficiently dangerous mission.

Clifford twisted the telegram between his fingers nervously. He had not the slightest doubt concerning Left Paw's guilt. He was equally sure that Don Alessandro and Lupocino had planned the crime, and that the doctor was cognizant of the plan when he came to disclaim responsibility; but there was no way in which he could convert his suspicions into legal evidence. In spite of the work in which he was engaged, there was nothing melodramatic in Clifford's nature. If he could accomplish anything, he wanted no recognition, save the approval of his own conscience. Circumstances had forced a melodramatic part upon him; but he had no desire to emerge triumphantly into the limelight for public approbation. He tried to look at the work impersonally, to convince himself that he was prompted by no desire for individual vangeance, and that he was unselfishly working for the good of his own people and country. But as he pictured Ralston's lifeless eyes staring out from the blood-stained berth in the ship's cabin, he remembered other eyes—the kindly ones of his old benefactor who had been killed at the instigation of the Mano Nero in New York.

He would not acknowledge, even now, that he was capable of exacting a personal vengeance; but with those memories filling his mind, it would have gone ill with Peppo, the Rat, if he had obstructed his path as he made his way to the street, escaping from the solitude of his apartment in spite of the fatigue which had driven him to it a half hour before. The little thief was busy with his own affairs, however, and only glanced up from his task in a dark corner as he passed, and Clifford smiled grimly as he saw that he was absorbed in delicately stropping his knife on a tattered shoe.

The American wandered aimlessly

toward the Toledo. He had come out only for the sake of the companionship of the crowd, and he wished to get where it was thickest. He had renewed many old acquaintances and made many new friends during his stay in Naples, and a dozen people greeted him as he strolled along; but his own greetings were formal and perfunctory, for he had no desire for casual conversation. From force of habit, he turned into the Fortunio, which was crowded with people who had come from the band concert in the Piazza Municipio.

Seeking only the companionship of a crowd, he paid little attention to individuals, and started for a vacant table in a retired corner; but his progress was suddenly arrested by Alinari, who stepped in front of him with outstretched hand. Clifford needed to exercise all of the self-control which he could command; for, seated at the table from which the lawyer had risen, were Don Alessandro and Lupocino.

"Mr. Clifford, you are the very man I most wished to see!" exclaimed Alinari. "I do not like to be the bearer of bad news; but I have just met the agent of the steamship company, and he told me of a most distressing report which he had received from Gibraltar."

"You need not try to soften it; I have already heard, if you refer to Ralston's death," answered Clifford quietly. "It is a pity that he did not accept your suggestions; the event seems to have justified your warning."

Alinari pointed to a vacant chair at their table. "Will you join us?" he asked courteously. "I should like to hear the particulars."

There were no two people in the world whom Clifford wished more to avoid at that particular moment than the lawyer's companions; but they were both looking at him intently, and he felt that he must face it out or give such offense that a future meeting would be impossible. He accepted the invitation, and formally acknowledged the introductions as he took his seat.

Lupocino greeted him with his wolfish smile; and, while Don Alessandro was cordial, there was a puzzled look in his eyes. Clifford knew that he ran grave risk of identification; but the latest developments had made him reckless, and in that lay his safety. He appeared absolutely natural, and the self-reliant, frank-faced young American was radically different from the shifty, suspicious Italian convict whose mannerisms he had assumed with the character.

"I know very little about the particulars," he said in answer to the lawyer's query. "I received only the bare announcement that the poor chap died from hemorrhage from the reopening of the wound which he received here. He seemed so well when I went with him to the steamer that the news of his death was a surprise and shock to me. I suppose that I shall receive fuller details when the ship arrives at New York and his friends make an investigation. It is a most unfortunate affair, and I fear it will tend to make the feeling against your countrymen more bitter in New York."

Lupocino's lip curled viciously; but Alinari nodded a grave assent, and said: "I agree with you; a most unfortunate affair, and a disgrace to Naples. It will be difficult to persuade Americans that it was such an incident as may happen in any large city and not the result of a deep-laid conspiracy."

Clifford's smile was very grim as he looked from one to another. "Extremely difficult when the entire truth is known," he replied. "I suppose that you know the reason for his sudden return?"

Alinari shrugged his shoulders.

"I imagined that his wound, and possibly fear of another attack, convinced him that he had better leave Naples."

"Ralston did not know the meaning of fear, unfortunately," said Clifford quickly. "He was called home by the discovery of very important evidence in the case of an Italian named Cirillo, who is under indictment for murder in New York."

"I heard a good deal about that case when I was there," said Alinari. "I hope the evidence was favorable to Mr. Ralston's client."

Clifford remained silent for a moment, and both the priest and Lupocino moved their chairs closer to the table.

"On the face of it, it was absolutely damning; but, if poor Ralston's theory was correct, it may prove to be most favorable," he said thoughtfully. "Have you heard of the robbery of the Salipi jewels here in Naples?"

The three heads nodded together.

"It was a nine days' wonder for the local press," said the lawyer.

"They are the new evidence," continued Clifford. "Ralston was able to identify the bracelet which figured in the case as part of the stolen property; but his client denied knowledge of its origin and of the whereabouts of the rest. Unfortunately for his contention, the remainder of the loot has just been discovered, cunningly concealed in Cirillo's apartment."

Alinari looked at him inquiringly. "Then, if what I heard about the case in New York is reliable, Ralston's theory must have been an ingenious one to construe that into evidence favorable to his client," he said skeptically. "I understood that the one weak link in the chain of evidence was absence of apparent motive, and jewels to the value of a million francs would supply it."

Don Alessandro shifted nervously in his seat, and Clifford noticed that Lupocino gave him a warning glance.

"His theory was an ingenious one, and it happens that the finding of the loot fits into it perfectly," said Clifford, lighting a cigarette with great deliberation. "In substance, it implied that the whole case against Cirillo was fabricated by people who wished to get him out of the way. His theory was open to the same objection as the evidence against his client; he was unable to discover the motive. That was what he was searching for over here, and he suspected strongly that he would find it in some of the Neapolitan ramifications of the New York Black Hand."

Lupocino chuckled derisively. "Does anything happen to a man with an Italian name that the Americans do not cry 'Black Hand!'" he exclaimed. "It was never heard of in Italy."

Alinari looked at him reprovingly, and Don Alessandro laid a great hand on his arm.

"Patience, my son!" he admonished him. "Let us hear what this gentleman, who evidently knows our people as well as his own, can tell us of it."

Clifford smiled at the almost fatherly attitude of the priest, realizing that he was not the only one of the group who possessed a double identity.

"I'm more interested in hearing if his friend was successful in his search," answered Lupocino, shaking off the restraining hand roughly. "That would be fact; the other could be nothing but fiction."

There was challenge in his tone, but Clifford did not care to accept it.

"It makes little difference whether it is fact or fancy," he said indifferently. "I could only romance about it, or grope about blindly for something to catch hold of, as poor Ralston did. Even if his guess or his reasoning had been correct, it could hardly be expected that he would have accomplished much here; for, in the first place, he was sent to bed on the night of his arrival, and kept there until the day of his departure."

Lupocino looked at him expectantly; but Clifford puffed at his cigarette, and it was apparent that he did not intend to volunteer anything more.

"And, in the second place, there was probably nothing for him to discover, which would make your first explanation superfluous?" suggested Lupocino sneeringly.

"Exactly, and therefore demonstrate that the attack on him, if it was directed by any mysterious organization, was equally superfluous and uncalled for," retorted Clifford. "The event proved your contention to be correct. There was nothing for him to discover *here* —that's why he started for home."

Again the priest's hand was laid on his companion's arm, and this time Clifford noticed that the powerful fingers gripped so hard that Lupocino winced from the pain.

"His news from home suggested that

he might find what he was looking for in New York?" asked Alinari.

Clifford made a little gesture of protest. "I don't know that I have a right to betray confidence, for his work will undoubtedly be carried on by others; but I believe that it more than suggested it," he said. "If Ralston's theory was correct, its truth was bound to be demonstrated sooner or later; for it implied that many people must be concerned in the conspiracy, and some one of them was sure to betray it by stupidity or carelessness. I'm not at liberty to tell all I know of it, but I believe that is just what happened. In attempting to supply that last link in the evidence against Cirillo—a motive—somebody blundered and betrayed the real motive for wishing to get the accused man out of the way."

Lupocino's habitual scowl deepened. "Why should they go to such a lot of trouble?" he said incredulously. "If they wanted to get rid of him—pouf!" He made an explanatory gesture with his expressive hands—a gesture readily understood in a community where the knife is so commonly used. "It must have been stupid advice which would lead to the sacrifice of a million francs' worth of jewels to get a man hanged, when a thrust in the ribs would have put him out of the way just as effectually."

"Was anything found secreted with the jewels?" asked Don Alessandro, rising.

Clifford hesitated as if debating in his mind the propriety of answering; in reality to aim deliberately at the first definite mark which had presented itself.

"I don't believe I should be indiscreet in answering you," he said slowly. "Yes, there was something else found."

"What?" demanded Don Alessandro.

"A very curious document, I believe," answered Clifford carelessly, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that his shot had made a bull's-eye; for, with a malediction which was hardly seemly on priestly lips, Don Alessandro grasped Lupocino by the arm and hurried him from the café.

Clifford found himself alone with Alinari who regarded him with a satirical grin on his lips.

"Mr. Clifford, when I met you with poor Ralston, I told you that I was anxious to have him continue his instructions in your great national game; but I believe you would make a better teacher, in one feature, at least," he said.

"You flatter me; I am not a poker player," answered Clifford.

"Then you are wasting great natural talents; for you are the best bluffer I ever met," said the Italian, smiling; but his face was serious as he leaned across the table. "Remember that I warned Ralston," he said earnestly. "I would hardly venture to say to you what I said to him; but I'll repeat a little story which I heard on the steamer.

"It's of two of your countrymen out West, who were playing freeze-out," continued Alinari. "Bill dealt, and he and Jim each drew one card. They bet on their hands until everything they had was in the pot.

"'What you got?' asked Jim, as he threw in his last chip.

"Bill spread out his hand, and started to rake in the pot. 'Four aces; count 'em!' he said.

"'No good; drop that money! I've got a busted flush and the drop on you.'

"Bill took just a quarter of a second to assure himself that Jim had described the situation as accurately as he had called his hand.

"'Both good!' he acknowledged—and I might add that all of the men in the smoking room agreed that Bill played a wise game in letting that pot go."

Clifford laughed, as he rose from the table. "I'll bear that in mind, if I ever sit into a game," he said; and Alinari accompanied him along the Toledo toward his house.

The continuation of this story will be published two weeks later, in the January month-end issue; on sale December 25th.

No Smoking

By Morgan Robertson

Author of "Man Eaters," Etc.

Mr. Robertson is remembered by all "Popular" readers as the author of a remarkable story, entitled "Man Eaters," which appeared in the April number of the magazine. The following tale of some who went down to the sea in ships is one of the best pieces of fiction ever penned by this versatile writer

I HAD heard him described by my brother, at whose house I lived when ashore, and who was one of the twenty thousand men on his pay roll.

He was a self-made man, proud of both creator and handiwork—proud of the latter especially, for it included not only the making of himself, but the making of others; also, the digging of holes in the ground from which emerged tons and tons of metal, the irrigating of waste lands, the building of steamships and railroads, the breeding of horses and cattle, the creation of model towns and communities, the consolidation of struggling industries into trusts, of which his was the controlling vote; and the placing of men whom he had made in positions of high legislative and judicial importance.

As for the self he had made, it was such a self as would satisfy a multimillionaire. It was a self, as he explained, when he so chose, founded upon a lifelong abstinence from alcohol and tobacco—also, on an intolerance of defeat, either in his own line of effort or in others. Succeed, live virtuously, or do business elsewhere, was his manifesto to man. His shops, farms, and various properties were studded with "No Smoking" signs. He had discharged a ranch superintendent for failing to irrigate from a river gone dry, and an office boy for lighting a cigarette after hours.

He had courted three congressional investigations, had smitten in the face with a folded newspaper a senator of the United States, and had declined a luncheon invitation from the President. Mentally, he was supreme and secure in an armor of justifiable self-esteem; physically, a six-foot, middle-aged Adonis, with a dark, stern face, a keen, gray eye, and a voice that could not, even had he tried, utter an appealing note.

He had never in his life asked a favor, not even work as a boy. He had worked for himself at the beginning, then made others work for him. Briefly, he was such a man as might be pictured leading a cavalry charge, commanding a ship through storm or battle, swaying an antagonistic majority by fire of oratory, or penetrating, alone and unaided, the waste portions of the world for fame of discovery. He was a master of men, but not quite of himself; for, at the proper time, he listened to the sentence of a conclave of physicians—quit work for a year, or die!

He chose the former; but, realizing that he could not make his work quit him, should he remain within reach of it, he decided upon a long sailing voyage; and, as he owned or controlled no sailing ships, he promptly bought one about to sail for Hongkong, directed her captain to prepare the after cabin

for his use, and closed up his immediate affairs in one day of dictating, telephoning, and telegraphing.

All these things my brother told me; but what he did not tell me was that the ship he had bought was the one I had signed in as ordinary seaman, and that he had a daughter of twenty who would make the voyage with him. As I was but eighteen, the latter news would not have greatly affected me, had it not come coincidently with the former. When you are scouring a brass gangway stanchion at the behest of a good-looking first mate whom you like, and you find yourself confronted by a sweet-faced vision in gray who smiles at you, and a frowning autocrat who orders you out of the way, you are likely to be affected. I certainly was —by two distinct and strong emotions, admiration for the girl, and dislike of the father.

The good-looking first mate escorted them aft, where they met the skipper, who showed them below, while I scoured brass furiously until ordered to desist by the mate. The exigency was past; the owner had come, traversed the gangway, and gone below.

"Wipe off that brass," said the mate genially, "and put your gear away. And say, youngster," he added, as I started, "you were smiled at a while back. Make good. Keep your shirt buttoned up, and wear your socks."

"Yes, sir," I answered; "I will."

Socks and buttons are not recognized by the etiquette of the forecastle, and I was glad of the tutelage. Mr. Stuart, the mate, a man of about thirty, was, or had been, according to the parlance of the navy, a "bilge midshipman"; that is, an Annapolis man who had failed in examinations, or had been expelled for hazing, or some such reason, but whose love of the sea had kept him at it.

I think that Mr. Stuart had almost won his commission when his light went out, for a more gentlemanly, refined, and generous officer I never met at sea. The men obeyed him because they wanted to, as I had furiously scoured the brass.

Captain Bruce was another kind of a man; tall, angular, old, and anxious of face. He had held command early in life, but had lost his ship on the second voyage, and since then had sailed mate, until this ship came to him. The second mate was a middle-aged sea dog, who has little place in this story. The ship was the typical American kind, carrying, beside the skipper and mates, two boatswains, a carpenter and sailmaker, cook and steward, and twenty hands before the mast, of which another youngster and myself were ordinary seamen, the rest able. These were the usual mixture of German, Irish, Dago, "Sou'wegian," and others, not one a lover of his fellow man, or a student of the simple life.

So when, at noon of the second day out, the starboard watch turned out for dinner, and found a neatly printed sign tacked to the bulkhead with the legend, "No Smoking," the profane comment was only equalled in voltage by that of the other watch, when, on going below at one bell, they found a similar sign in the port forecastle.

Loudly they swore, and fiercely they smoked when the meal was over. Then they laughed forgivingly. It was all a joke, they conceded. As a German of the starboard watch named Weisbacher voiced it: "A leetle foolishness by dot goot feller, Captain Bruce."

But when they mustered out at one bell, and were *not* turned to; and while they loafed around the windlass listening to the lurid remarks of the port watch as they surrounded the beef kid and looked at the sign, they began to have misgivings, which were confirmed at two bells, when the captain and two mates came forward.

"Heave out, here," sang out the first mate cheerily. "All bags, bedding, and ditty boxes out on deck for inspection. All tobacco and pipes. Both watches. All hands, here. Chips, doctor, sails, bosuns, both—everybody. Turn out and give up your pipes and tobacco."

The port watch, some of whom had turned in for the afternoon sleep, straggled out, knocking the ashes from their pipes and pocketing them. I was a

member of this watch, but, not being a smoker, was but mildly interested; and, well socked and buttoned, now, I stood under the weather rail, where I could not only see the fun forward, but watch the owner and his daughter on the poop. He stood at the head of the steps, erect and menacing, with the girl on his arm, the smile upon her face offsetting the frown upon his own. But it was a smile of interest and sympathy, not of derision, or approval of the ruling.

The carpenter and sailmaker, with the steward and cook, joined the muster at the fore hatch. The boatswains lived with the men and were already in line, so that all hands except the man at the wheel listened to the official indorsement of the signs in the forecastles.

"Men," said the captain, "as all of you must know, the owner is on board; and, as he owns the ship, and owns the money that pays us all, he is entitled to his own way. So, as he has decided that there shall be no smoking, and no chewing of tobacco aboard his ship, his wishes must be obeyed. Bring out all your dunnage and dump your pipes and tobacco on the hatch. It will all be returned to you at the end of the voyage."

The men looked at him in amazement, then at one another. A few drew forth their pipes and started toward the forecastle doors. Others made no sign nor motion. As a whole, they were doubtful, uncertain, unsettled. Had the popular first mate spoken at this juncture he might have swerved them toward obedience. Had a master rebel spoken, there would have been a unanimous protest on the spot. As it was, only one—the good-natured Weisbacher—gave utterance to a possibility perhaps unthought of by others.

"Is it so, sir," he asked respectfully, "dot we fellars who pull your ropes und scrub your deck are not to have der only comfort dot a sailor man has? You can stop mine grub, cappen. You can keep me up in mine watch below. You can damn me, und maybe you can hit me, und still I will work, because I signed. But you stop my smoke, und, by Gott, you make me a mutiny and a murder. You hear, sir?"

Weisbacher was in no sense a master spirit among them, but his speech stopped the drift toward the forecastles, sent pipes back into pockets, and roused stronger men to resentment. An Englishman, an Irishman, a Swede, and an American—the latter an educated man—began declaiming at once on sailors' rights, while the mild, and not too confident, skipper raised his hand deprecatingly, and the two mates backed toward the fife rail, where were a few loose belaying pins.

But nothing happened. The owner left the poop, walked briskly forward, and faced the angry group of men.

"What does this mean?" he asked sternly. "Are you having trouble, Captain Bruce, in carrying out my wishes? Stand aside, then, you and your officers. I will put this through myself."

His clear, dark eye wandered around the crowd, and where it fell upon a man, that man seemed to shrivel and grow smaller. The captain, shamed and humiliated, stepped over in my direction; the two mates took their hands off the belaying pins they had seized, and the owner's daughter descended the poop steps and came forward as far as the main hatch. I felt of my buttons and looked at my socks.

"I wish," said the owner incisively, as man after man shrank under his glance, "smoking and chewing of tobacco to cease on board my ship. To that end, every man will bring his clothing and effects out here, where the officers can search for tobacco and pipes."

Weisbacher led the rush for the forecastles; the Englishman, Irishman, and the Swede brought up the rear—only one, the American, daring to speak against the edict. He walked boldly up to the owner, and stared him in the face.

"Do you know, sir," he asked, in a high-pitched voice that trembled a little, "that what you are doing may result in the utter demoralization of this ship's company—that tobacco is more

to a sailor than food? You are jeopardizing your property, if not your life."

"Silence," thundered the autocrat. "I am the judge of my actions, not you."

For a moment Thompson stared into his eyes, then dropped his own and meekly joined the others. Boylike, I grinned, and the captain observed me.

"Here, you," he said, assuming a sternness not compatible with his mood. "You get aft and take the wheel. Send that man forward."

I departed for the wheel, meeting the young lady at the hatch. I was near enough to her age to attract her notice, yet enough younger to disarm any embarrassment she may have felt. She was a very pretty girl, with eyes as gray as her clothing, and when she smiled—as she did when I faced her—the smile seemed formed more by these gray eyes than by her lips.

"Are the men angry?" she asked.

"Yes, miss," I answered, lifting my cap as politely as was possible. "They're very angry. They're fighting mad."

"Is—is Mr. Stuart in any danger from them?"

"Oh, no, miss. They like him; and then, too, he can take care of himself. Excuse me, please. I must take the wheel."

I hurried aft, wondering at her interest in the mate. "Perhaps," I mused as I relieved the helmsman, "it is because her father and the skipper are in plain sight." I took no account of the second mate, also hidden behind the house, for I was young in inductive reasoning.

Steering a well-trimmed ship "by the wind" under all canvas is easy, even for a boy; and, standing there, I had good opportunity to observe things as they happened on board that ship—not only on that afternoon, but on others. My being sent to the wheel in my watch below was but the first hint we received that she was to be an "all hands" ship—that is, the afternoon and first dog watch below would be spent on deck, at work; and, because I was an efficient helmsman in fine weather, it was decreed that I should be at the wheel when on deck, while the rightful incumbent worked at seamanly work beyond my powers.

First, I remarked the progress and the closing of the inspection forward—the searching of dunnage, the coming aft of the owner on the arm of his daughter, the skipper with a dishpan heaped full of pipes and tobacco, and the scattering of the men to tasks about the rigging by the two mates. The skipper went into the cabin by the forward companion, but the owner and his daughter climbed the poop steps to descend by the after.

As the owner went down, he groaned audibly, and I heard her sympathetic endearments.

"Don't coddle me," he answered harshly. "It's nervous dyspepsia, of course, rendered active by temporary excitement. But one annoyance is removed. There'll be no more nicotine under my nose for this voyage."

She followed him down, and soon the captain appeared. When he had glanced at the compass, growled the usual skipperly injunction to "keep a good full," he was joined by the mate.

"Well, sir," said the latter, after he had taken his squint at the compass, "what do you think of this? Don't you think, captain, that it is the most inane, insane bit of business you ever heard of? To stop sailors' tobacco? Why, the government, with all its power, never dared attempt that in the navy, though it did stop the grog."

"I know, I know," rejoined the captain wearily. "I know the danger, and I can only hope that the men will submit quietly. But I shall enforce his orders."

"It may cost you your life," said the mate, his face darkening.

"Yes, it may; but my life is not worth much, nor will it be of long duration. I have spent most of it before the mast or as mate. I want to end it as master, with the confidence and good-will of my owner."

"That reasoning applies more to me than to you, captain; for I am much younger, and have still to obtain my command. But I would not care to

base my prospects upon the favor of such a man as this."

"That is your affair, not mine, Mr. Stuart. I expect you to bear me out in this."

"All right, sir. You can count upon that; but I will not answer for the men."

They separated, the captain going down the poop steps to enter the cabin, the mate, after another glance at the compass and at me, lounging in the weather alley, near the steps. Soon the young lady appeared, and when Mr. Stuart spied her he beckoned.

It was either the concave of the cro'-jack or the spanker, acting like the reflecting curves of a whispering gallery, that made their conversation audible to me at the wheel; for they spoke in low tones that came to my ear from another direction. And, to my surprise, they seemed to be well acquainted; for they spoke of mutual friends in New York, Washington, and Annapolis, and referred to their first meeting when she, as a small girl, had been queen of the hop while he, as a senior cadet, had been king. Then they touched upon other matters, and he begged her to intercede with her father.

"For you, Nellie girl, are the only person in the world who can influence him. He will do for you what he would not do for money or power. Tell him that the men will suffer cruelly, and that there is danger of mutiny."

"I know, Fred," she answered. "That boy at the wheel—isn't he homely, Fred?"—I ripped off socks and buttons next watch below—"That boy told me that the men were frightfully angry, but that they liked you. You are not in danger, are you?"

"Yes; for they like their smoke better than they like me, or any one else. Do what you can, Nellie."

The rest of their talk is not vital to this story.

When relieved at four bells I went forward with aching bones and ate my supper in a nest of anarchists. Loud and dire and deep were the curses called down upon the heads of the afterguard, and even the sweet-faced Miss Nellie did not escape the benediction. Women aboard ship always cause trouble, according to forecastle traditions.

Trouble came very quickly. I did not know at the time the inordinate craving of a smoker for his pipe, or the extent of the suffering entailed by deprivation; so, from my vantage point of inexperience, I made lofty and superior comments on the situation, and was rewarded by an open-handed blow on the face from Williams, the Englishman.

Smarting with pain and furious, I sprang toward the bread barge, meaning to return the blow with this heavy box of wood, but was stopped by Thompson, and bundled into my bunk. Then, for a few moments, my countryman busied himself with Williams; and the matter ended with Thompson nursing sore knuckles and Williams a swollen nose, and the crowd considering Thompson's pronunciamento—that there would be no boy slaves in that forecastle.

But while the watch below was impressed, the watch on deck, attracted by the noise and peering into our apartment, must needs make comments and take sides, to the result that Swanson, the Swede, and Daly, the Irishman, locked themselves together and whirled around the deck, each viciously striving to throw the other, while the rest looked moodily on without interfering. Mr. Stuart came forward, and stopped this fight, then wisely hurried aft to escape the questions hurled at him.

With the leading spirits of the crew thus setting the example, all the others yielded to the irritability caused by the stopping of their solace, and fight after fight occurred, on deck or below, in the few days that followed, while insolent answers were hurled to the skipper and mates when they gave an order, and threatening looks were directed at the owner whenever he appeared on deck.

The cook spoiled the dinner on the third day; then, with a long carving knife, defended his galley and his

health from an argumentative mob that menaced him at the door.

The carpenter flourished his broad-ax at the sailmaker, who had sought his company because of their common misery, and was later driven out of the forecastle, to which he had retreated.

The boatswains were thrashed in their watch below, and allowed their authority only on deck.

The steward was discharged by the owner for poor service at the cabin table, and reinstated because no one could take his place.

Even the captain and officers—smokers all—gave way to the mental attitude, and there was a petulance and a harshness to their manner that made matters worse.

Men who steered badly were driven from the wheel until two-thirds of the crew had been thus disgraced. But I escaped this, possibly because my nervous balance had not been overthrown, and was kept at the back-breaking task of steering six hours one day and nine the next, according to the watches. My confrère of the other watch was a smoker, a poor helmsman, and had steered his legitimate trick and taken his chance like the rest.

And so, with the gospel of brotherly love at a discount, and all hateful thoughts of mutiny, murder, apprehension, and fear at a premium, this big ship sailed out into the Atlantic and was hit by the tail-end of a West India cyclone centering east of Hatteras.

It came at the usual time, at the end of a hard day's work, and as the weary men pulled and hauled and labored at rope and canvas they were cheered by the sight of the fatuous owner carrying the dishpan full of pipes and tobacco out of the forward companion to the lee rail, where he threw the whole overboard.

Standing at the wheel, I had heard loud voices in the cabin, and surmised that Captain Bruce had been expostulating with the owner, but was hardly prepared for the heated argument which ensued when they met again near the wheel.

Captain Bruce had changed; his seamed and anxious face had hardened, and he looked steadily into the eyes of the owner, whose already hard countenance was black with rage.

"You have done, sir," said the captain, "the one thing necessary to precipitate a mutiny. While that tobacco was on board, the men might hope for it. Now it is gone, the hope has gone. If you have a revolver, get it ready, for you may need it."

"A revolver? Get it ready? You coward! Do you think I do business with revolvers? You are not the man I want here. You are discharged. D'you hear? Discharged. I don't want you in my employ."

"Discharged!" repeated the captain, with a smile. "Oh, no. Are you a student of maritime law? I think not, or you would know that a master cannot be discharged on the high seas. The master's authority is inviolate from port to port. This morning I took the liberty of examining my slop stores in a room off the after cabin. I found all the tobacco gone."

"I threw it over the side the first day aboard," spluttered the owner.

"I surmised as much," said the captain sternly, "and at that moment lost my faith in you and in my future as a master in your employ. I am tired of all this unpleasantness. Here you are merely a passenger, and as such you have committed a crime in broaching cargo. That is what you have done."

"Crime? Damn you, what do you mean? Take yourself out of my presence, and send me your first officer. At once—d'you hear?"

"I will call him when he is disengaged," said Captain Bruce calmly.

Then he looked forward and aloft. Mr. Stuart was amidships overseeing the taking in of the foresail—a job which, in the furious wind now blowing, needed his undivided attention for the next ten minutes. The ship was close-hauled, and the boatswain on the forecastle deck was slacking away the tack while the whole port watch hauled on the clew garnet, gathering up the clew, inch by inch. Clearly, he was not available at present.

The second mate was equally busy; he was aloft with his crowd, standing in the bunt of the upper mizzen topsail yard, and objurgating the men vigorously while they reefed the sail. His boatswain was with him, engaged at the weather oaring. Not a man in the line of promotion could be had to supplant the skipper; but, staggering aft with the cabin supper was the steward, and him the captain called.

"Steward," he said, when that person arrived. "Go down in my room and bring up a pair of handcuffs, and tell Mr. Stuart to send two strong men aft here to me."

"Yes, sir," answered the steward, and departed.

The men arrived as soon as the steward with the irons—two strong men, Daly and Swanson, who seemed to forget their quarrel in the tenacity of their grip on the owner's arms, when the captain had so directed them.

"Now, sir," said the captain, as he took the manacles from the steward, "it is my duty and my right to iron you and confine you in your room for the rest of this passage. Shall I do so, or will you agree, and give me your word to that effect, that you will keep your nose and your hands out of the running of this ship?"

"You insolent scoundrel!" stormed the owner, his eyes glaring and his fingers working convulsively. "I'll ruin you for this. Few men have dared to cross me, and"—he lowered his voice to a hiss—"they're all in jail, or in the jail graveyard."

"But, I'm here; master of this ship."

"Mr. Stuart," called the owner suddenly. "Come here."

Mr. Stuart heard and came. The two clews of the foresail were up, and the men manning the buntlines. He could now be spared.

"Mr. Stuart," said the autocrat, when the brown-faced young officer arrived, "I appoint you captain of this ship; and my first order to you is that you confine your predecessor in irons."

"I'm very sorry, sir," answered the mate, shaking the clinging drops of water from his sou'wester rim by a quick turn of his head, "but Captain Bruce is the master here. He signed me before I ever met you."

"But I am the owner of this ship. I dictate to all on board, for I am the man that pays you."

"Enough of this," said the captain incisively. "Mr. Stuart, it's still blowing up. Get a reef in that upper foretopsail, and set the spenser. It may be all we can carry before morning. Now, sir"—this to the owner—"hold up your hands and go in irons. You are a discontented, dissatisfied trouble maker, and I shall get you off my mind."

At this moment, while the infuriated man struggled in the grasp of the two sailors, and the mate had turned to go forward, the companion opened suddenly and Miss Nellie appeared, cloaked and hooded, and with an expression of fright and anger on her face.

"Father," she exclaimed. "Oh, father, what are they doing to you? Fred, Fred, don't let them! Help father."

Mr. Stuart stopped and looked back, his features strained and twitching in his embarrassment; but he resolutely shook his head, and turned away.

"Oh, you coward!" she called. "Don't you ever dare address me again."

This momentarily stopped him; but he went on without turning his head. Meanwhile, the captain had snapped the irons on the wrists of the owner, and was pushing him toward the companion door.

"You will be locked in your stateroom," he said, "until you give me the promise I asked. Your daughter shall have her liberty."

The owner had stopped his struggles when he felt the cold steel on his wrists; and, deadly pale now, was clutching his stomach, evidently in great pain. He stumbled down the stairs, followed by his daughter and the captain, while the steward and the two sailors went forward. Soon I heard the slamming of a door in the cabin; then the captain appeared, and, spying me shivering in my sockless shoes and buttonless shirt, mercifully

ordered the wheel relieved. I had steered all day, but it was my last long trick in that ship, for from now on things moved rapidly.

We were practically hove to on the starboard tack, heading east-southeast and breasting a wind and sea that came straight out of the south. It had not blown so hard that the starboard watch could not reef the mizzen topsail or the port watch clew up the foresail, but before my relief appeared, I had noticed an increase in the wind and a slight hauling to the west.

The captain, too, saw this when he noticed my condition, and, calling Mr. Stuart aft again, he said:

"Never mind reefing your fore-topsail. Furl it. But first furl the mizzen topsail while the crowd is aloft. We're in for a time. The barometer's falling and the thermometer rising, while the wind is hauling to the west. That means that the storm centre is coming out our way, and will pass close to the north'ard. I don't dare scud. We'll have to fight it out on this tack. Tell the men that I'll signal the first ship we meet for tobacco, and that there'll be grog at eight bells."

The grog may have done some good, that night, but smoke, in its reality, is too intangible a substance to he replaced by its promise; and, though the men worked their best, and no man could say that another was to blame, things went wrong from the beginning.

As the wind stiffened, sail after sail was blown away, even as we were furling them. At midnight we were stripped to the brand-new main spenser, fore-topmast staysail and reefed spanker. At two o'clock these were gone, and we lay hove down to port, with the lower yardarms dipping, while the mighty seas swept us and the gale sang through our tautened weather rigging with a sound curiously like that of a huge violin out of tune. No rigging could stand the strain and the continued vibration. At four in the morning the fore and mizzen masts went, snapping at the hounds of the lower masts, taking with them the main topgallant mast, and dropping to leeward. The ship partly righted, and we cut away the wreck. This done, we dodged the falling main topmast, that came whirling down like a flung stick, hitting the side of the ship with a force that sent the two arms of the crosstrees crashing into the planking. As the ship was taking a weather roll at this moment, the hole was well beneath the water line, and things looked serious.

The two legs of the crosstrees—six-inch beams of oak—twisted away from the mast, but remained in the hole, effectually preventing us from covering the leak with thrummed canvas. They could not be dislodged from the outside, and when the carpenter reported three feet of water in the well, the skipper decreed that the main hatch be taken off, cargo removed, and the beams driven out. So, while a gang manned the pump, the rest went to work by lantern light.

Mr. Stuart went down the hatch to oversee the job, but in half an hour he came up and appeared before the captain on the poop. As I happened to be hauling aboard and coiling down trailing running gear at the mizzen rigging, I heard what he said.

"The men have found cases of tobacco and cigars, captain," he reported, "and, in spite of me, they have broken into them. They are all smoking cigars."

"What!" roared the captain. "Broached cargo, have they? Mr. Stuart, you go down there among them, and tell them to send a box of cigars aft here at once."

"Yes, sir," answered the mate, turning away; and I felt, rather than saw, his smile.

At daylight, the carpenter reported seven feet of water, and the mate that the crosstrees had punched the holes below the 'tween deck, and to reach them they would have to descend into the hold.

Obviously there was no time, and Captain Bruce gave the order: "Clear away and provision the three boats." Then he went down, and came up with the owner. His wrists were free, but

his spirit unbroken, for he immediately quit the skipper's side and came down to the main deck, where the water was washing back and forth.

What he thought found no expression in his stern, dark face. What he saw were fat perfectos, slim panatellas, slimmer stogies, and still slimmer cigarettes in the mouths of haggard, weary men who, working for life, still found time to grin and jeer at him.

Mr. Stuart and the second mate smoked shamelessly, and behind, on the poop, Captain Bruce secured a light from the man at the wheel. Discipline was at an end. Twenty-nine men, about to take to open boats, were reduced to their lowest terms.

He turned his back on us all, and went below; but when he came up with his daughter he requested that the mate should take them in his boat.

We quit that ship ten minutes before her plunge, and an hour before darkness closed down. When daylight came again, the other boats, commanded by Captain Bruce and the second mate, were not in sight; and, though there was still half a gale blowing, and a heavy sea heaving us, the mate tried to follow the skipper's last orders—to sail north to the lane routes. The experiment was disastrous; the first blast of wind in the lugsail as we rose to the top of a sea snapped the rotten mast and we let it go, to lighten the boat.

But soon we made a discovery that brought joy to the hearts of all. On investigating the boxes and kegs stowed in the bottom, it came out that one keg contained water, and one box hard bread—the rest holding tobacco and cigars. The men had seen to it that the tobacco came along; but, as to the reason of the shortage in food, no man could explain. The mate averred that his orders had been disobeyed, and he used language which, in spite of the presence of our passengers, was perhaps the strongest he had used in his life. But nothing could be done; he put us all on a short allowance, and directed us to keep watch for a sail.

Now, it is not vital to this story that I tell in detail of the horror of the days that followed, while we lay between the out and inbound tracks, far to the south of the lanes, roasting under the sun by day, and shivering with cold and wet by night, while the allowance was decreased to a swallow of water and a quarter of hard-tack per day. Nor of the philosophy and good humor of the men, smoking the best cigars they had smoked in their lives, and keeping their gullets moist by incessant chewing until the last, when, hunger and thirst turning their heads to mutiny, they were cowed by a pistol in the hand of the mate, unable to rise at the time; nor of the increasing good humor of the owner, taking his bite and sup on equal terms with the rest.

But I must speak of one thing—the wonderful vitality and courage of Miss Nellie, who cheered us all with her smiling presence, and even forgave Mr. Stuart for his desertion of her father. And I will tell of this as I explained it on board the eastbound steamship that finally picked us up, when most of us lay stretched out on the second-cabin floor, receiving such morsels of food as the two physicians in attendance decreed we should have. One of these was a passenger, and he had been one of the conclave that had sentenced our owner to the rest cure.

"You should have prescribed starvation," said the latter. "It has cured me completely—also worked a mighty change in my sentiments toward smoking. Now that I have seen men suffer so, I would never forbid it again."

"Right," answered the doctor. "It keeps men up under severe strain. See how this boy"—pointing to me—"went down for the lack of it."

"But my daughter?" queried the owner. "She received no such benefit, and she's the strongest of all; while the mate, who smoked, is weaker than the boy."

I beckoned them, and they came.

"The mate," I whispered, "gave Miss Nellie all his bread and water, but she didn't know it."

She knew it a little later, for I saw her arms around his neck.

Chrysanthemums

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "Tiddles-Toddles Tales," Etc.

"To every man his opportunity." Mr. Sabin tells how a well-limbed college man got his opportunity to play on the college nine, and of the altogether surprising result, in which a pretty girl has an interesting part to play

THE cheering suddenly ceased, the tossing banners flickered and died; for, out upon the torn field, the gallant runner was lying crumpled and motionless. In response to a quick beck of the referee, Trainer Conroy had hastily crossed from the side line, the two urchin water carriers, with splashing bucket, following precipitously.

"It's Jennings! Jennings is hurt! Knocked out!"

The announcement spread from lip to lip, through the spectators—with evident concern amidst the purple and gray, with stern restraint amidst the brown and gold. The game was within five minutes of the end, and the score was very close. The accident to Jennings might mean defeat to the one side, victory to the other. Thus, the gods had decided.

On the field, eighteen players threw themselves flat, as with one thought, and automatically rested. The two centres squatted, the ball between them.

The brown and gold, of grand stands and side lines, betrayed by only feminine "Oh's!" maintained a judicial demeanor; their medicine was strong, the gods were just; but the purple and gray seethed anxiously, while the little knot of workers—trainer, captain, referee, and water boys—clustered over the prostrate halfback. The trainer knelt and manipulated vigorously. With the hard-fighting left halfback out, the team's unanimity was badly shattered, and hopes would go glimmering.

Most interested among the onlookers—at least, keenest in observation—were the purple and gray substitutes; blanketed, Indian-like in their contours, but far from Indian in their restlessness; on the field but not of it; barred as effectually, unless fate interposed, by the side-line chalk as the spectators were by the side-line rail. Not a detail of the team's formations escaped them, and they could guess the play when the signal was indistinguishable.

'Twas trick plays, now. With only five minutes left, and the brown and gold defense unweakened, scoring must be by a trick. The catapult stunt, which had sent Jennings around—ah, if it but had succeeded! Just by a fluke had Jennings been tackled, as his foot slipped, by a man leaking through the interference.

Let Jennings get away, once, and—wow! The game was cinched.

Most tense of all was Matthews. Oblivious to his companions' muttered comment, he gazed fixedly at the succor being given Jennings. Supposing they did not bring Jennings to! Supposing they did not bring him to! That had been a fierce tackle. Jennings' head had jerked back; wellnigh had they heard his ribs crack. And now, if Conroy could not bring him to and make him fit—now was his, Matthews', chance! He would not wish to profit by another's misfortunes, but if——

He watched, leaning forward, his

lips slightly parted, his breath coming quickly, the color deepening in his cheeks. Would he be called?

The umpire, who had been signaled by the timekeepers, hastened to the group and tapped the trainer on the shoulder. Time was up.

Jennings was raised—the referee helped—and with the trainer and referee supporting him, his legs dragging, and his head wabbling, while a sympathetic "Oh!" ran through the spectators, he was taken to the side lines and covered with a blanket.

"Matthews," summoned the captain.

Matthews did not hear his name; but he knew. On the instant, he had sprung from the folds of his blanket to his feet; his fellows helped him jerk his sweater over his head, and he trotted gladly out upon the field.

Young, well-limbed, healthy, ambitious, gladly he trotted, to meet his fortune more than halfway. All his freshman year, hopeful, he had played on his class team; all his sophomore year, still hopeful, he had played on the varsity scrubs; payment for the battering and mauling, his junior year had advanced him, hopeful yet, to the substitute list of "the team"; and now, with the season almost over, hope had not persisted in vain. At last, he was entering his first big game.

Of course, he had played before, this year. He had played the Saturday previous, for instance; when, with the score safe beyond any possible contingency, he had been sent in, to get the experience—and to fill out the time. The papers had stated:

"With the score 18 to 0, the purple and gray retired their stars to the side lines, to save them for the crucial contest on the coming Saturday with the brown and gold. But even with an almost entirely substitute team two more touchdowns were made."

So this had not really been a game; and he had been given the ball only twice.

But now—*now;* a fight, and a hard fight, with the honor of his college at stake, and the Girl in the grand stand! The Girl, of the "gloriferous" eyes, and the straight, full figure, and the queenly way.

At the football rally, the night before, she had said to him: "You must win to-morrow, Mr. Matthews." And he had blushed and had been able only feebly to reply: "I hope we will. But I may not play, you see. I'm a substitute. They won't risk substitutes tomorrow, unless they have to."

'Twas reported that she was as good as engaged to young Professor Bresh. Humph! But, of course, that was only rumor, because Bresh took her around a lot. Bresh was a Harvard man—and he also, according to Matthews, was a bally fool. He, Matthews, loved her—Gad! how he loved her! He might not stand much show against a professor and a Harvard graduate, now, for he was only a substitute; but, later, he might be a regular, and rated as a star. If he could but make her appreciate him. She was so beautiful. For instance, if he might but win a game for his college! If he might but be given the chance—and now Jennings was out, and he was in!

The captain met him, and slowed him down, and put an arm across his shoulders, and walked him haltingly along, toward the ball and the waiting players.

"Five minutes more, old boy," crooned the captain—earnest, affectionate, grimy, redolent of perspiration and endeavor; a war horse just from the thick of the battle. "You know what that means—huh? It's up to you to save the game. You're as good as Jennings, but you've got to show it. We'd just started Jennings to going. He was headed straight down the field, for a touchdown. You bet he was! That's why they put him out. It was a dirty tackle—don't you forget it was a dirty tackle. Their right end is no good. Jones is taking care of him, every play. All you need watch is the right half; he's pretty tricky. But we'll take care of him, too. You carry the ball, old chap, and we'll see you through. Not a man on the team is quitting. You're fresh; there's only five minutes; we're relying on you. We

need just a touchdown—five little points to tie, and a goal to win. But you'll do it, old boy. Let 'em kill you. They'll try, but let 'em. You're the man to carry the ball. We'll use that catapult play. They can't solve it. The way they got Jennings was a mistake. It's our ball, too. We must keep it—see? Show the crowd that you're ready to succeed Jennings any old time. Why, Matt, now's your chance to make the team, straight. You win this game, and see what will happen to you. They beat us last year by a scratch; we don't want to let them beat us this year! Good old boy! Mind the signals and carry the ball, and when you aren't carrying it, help. Eleven men in every play, you know. We'll beat 'em. There's plenty of time. They can't hold a fresh man, who has the grit. So play like you meant it. It's your first big game, remember. Make good, for the old purple and gray; for the sake of Jennings—that was an awful dirty tackle—for the girls in the grand stand."

"Hurry up," called the umpire impatiently.

With a parting squeeze, the captain's arm left Matthew's shoulder.

"You bet!" he responded bluffly, to the hail. "All right, boys. Five minutes to play. You know what. Our ball."

The whistle blew. The two lines crouched against each other. Beside his full-back. Matthews also crouched, expectant. His heart beat wildly, but he was not afraid. Instead, all the energy of his being surged to his rescue—spurring him on while holding him in leash. He felt strong, strong, strong. He felt that his moment had arrived, and that nothing could stop him. A fierce passion to seize the ball came over him—to seize it and hug it, and, bearing it, to tear his way through all opposition, down the field, to the goal, for the honor of his college—for the sake of Jennings—for the edification of that throng amidst which was the Girl. He would do it. He was a giant.

"Play the game, boys," encouraged the captain, from position.

"Three, eleven, sixteen, fourteen, thirty-one——" No, it was not his signal, this time. The combination called for a mass on right tackle. Was he to be left out, then? The quarter must have a grouch on him. What if, now when he was there, he was not to have a chance, after all!

Even while thus thinking and rebelling, he plunged forward with the full-back—crash!—trying to jam the man with the ball through. Strain, push—u-u-uh! Down in a heap went the mob of strivers.

Up; separate; into position again, with an eye toward the linesman.

"Second down; seven yards to gain." Didn't make much that time, but every yard helps.

"Two, ten, one hundred four, nineteen——" a-ah! *His* signal! And seven yards to gain. Make his distance? He? He would make the goal! The purple and gray forever; and she was watching.

The blood poured to his heart, and swept out again. He gripped himself, and waited, poised. He must not let the least token escape him that it was his signal—the signal for the catapult play. No! But he saw everything clearly—his dart forward, clutching midway of the ball; his headlong swerve around the end, where his comrades were fighting to clear the path for him; his decisive dodging of the tacklers, his rush onward down the field—irresistible, fleet, nobody stopping him. The full-back sidestepped cleverly, while the crowd thundered, and the enemy lumbered in pursuit. The game was won. He had won it. He would be a hero. If only he might be a hero to the Girl, and some day tell her why he had done it!

The signal was being repeated, and stiffer grew the line and back field. All right. He heard the full-back at his elbow panting, with deep, quivering breath. He was conscious of a little twig on the ground just before him. He must not slip on it. He must meet the ball squarely and surely—clutch it, squeeze it, never let it go; and he must plant it behind the goal line, and as

near to the posts as possible, so that when it was brought out——

Now! The quarter, with bend of knees, was receiving the ball; with a leap, Matthews swooped forward instantly to take it from him. All was in motion. The double line before heaved and swayed and grappled, like gigantic ants in a death grip. A fumble? No! The ball, the ball! 'Twas time for the pass. There it came, with the quarter's strained, agonized face behind it; right into his arms, outstretching—biff! Look out!

With jar and flash of light he went sprawling, struck from the rear. Whang! As if his head had been flint, the sparks flew, blinding him. But never mind; keep moving. Sure! They couldn't stop him. He hadn't lost his feet—he had only stumbled; they couldn't stop him—he was still going; the ball was tight in his arms; squeeze it; run. How he was running!

It must have been that right half who had tackled him; he should have been watching out for that right half. But Captain Fudge had said *they* would take care of the right half, who was tricky. No matter; he wasn't stopped, anyway. Where was the interference? Oh! He was presumed to go it alone, now. That was a part of the catapult play. All hunky.

Tacklers to right of him, tacklers to left of him, and he was unprotected; but none of them got him. They dived vainly at him; he dodged them. Their hands slipped from him, he knocked them spinning like ninepins. On, and on, and on. The wind whistled in his ears, the cheers of the crowd thundered upon them.

Hurrah, hurrah! His feet were winged; he had not known that he could run so; the goal was far ahead; yet ever he sifted through the enemy while they lunged at him, gritting their teeth, grimaced—failed.

Where were his fellows? He had left them behind. Look out for that full-back—turn short and give him the straight arm—that's the ticket! Ta-ta, Mr. Full-back; almost—but not quite! The full-back was the last one.

Everybody was behind, now; glory was clear, ahead! His throat was dry, his chest was bound with iron bands, his head was bursting, but he increased his stride. He must not be caught, with the goal so near. Hurrah! Right between the two points he sped. He halted, and sat upon the ball, in approved fashion, and faced the field, to grin and to wait. What an uproar! A touchdown! A touchdown! He had made it, in nick of time, for his college. Listen—the crowd was counting, stentoriously, rhythmically: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, *nine,* TEN!" Perhaps the Girl was counting; he had made the touchdown for his college—but he had made it for her, also.

So, grinning and squatting, he waited, panting, satisfied, while the count was reiterated and the college cheer rang again and again, and the side lines gamboled and threw hats and caps. The other players came straggling from their distance—the team upbuoyed, jubilant, a-smile; the enemy depressed, angry, scowling. They clapped him on the back—the team did—clapped him hard, so that his hide, like his soul, tingled deliciously under the moleskin jacket. And the side lines were still gamboling and throwing things and slapping each other on the back, when the ball was taken out, to the fifteen-yard line, for the try at goal.

He followed, leisurely, happily. What he had been proffered to do, he had done; now 'twas up to somebody else to continue the work and make the one extra point to be added to his five.

A moment of suspense. The crowd was stilled, watching. The full-back, who did the kicking, mildly motioned the inclination of the ball to the right—to the left—easy—there! He stepped forward—the referee's arm fell—plunk!—and, as the enemy's line stopped short its futile charge, the ball floated across the goal bar.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, *eleven!*" chanted side lines and grand stand.

The official whistle sounded sharp

and imperative. The game was over. But the game was won. He had won it.

The substitutes rushed forward with their extra blankets and sweaters. The crowd poured irresistibly into the field; poured upon Matthews, overwhelmed him, grabbed him, hoisted him high. Like a Bacchus atop the vortex of devotees he was borne on, across the field, and out of the gates. He was no longer a substitute. He was "the man who won the game," and nothing was too good for him. Faces peered up at him; hands reached to touch him. Shucks! It really was embarrassing.

"Who's all right? Matthews! Matthews! He's all right!" And a three-times-three:

"'Rah, 'rah, 'rah!"

"'Rah, 'rah, 'rah!"

"'Rah, 'rah, 'rah! *Matthews!*" Well—they were carrying him upside-down part of the time, but he wondered if the Girl saw. He hoped so. She must be hearing, too. Was she proud that—she knew him? How about Professor Bresh, now—of Harvard! Huh! Surely she could appreciate "the man who won the game"; that ought to be something to offset a professorship, and Harvard influence. For to win the game was vital, eternal, big. He would not exchange life with anybody—with Bresh, or the president of the university, or the President of the United States; no, not if she but appreciated—would understand. Listen! All along the street, the boys were singing "Hail to the purple and gray," and punctuating the stanzas with the three-times-three for *him.*

At the doorway of the gym he was set down, and he fled within, smited mightily by friendly hands as he sped. Within, too, all was excitement; in the basement, men were stripping, washing, frolicking, declaiming, explaining, laughing hilariously; the atmosphere was damp with steam and strong with the acrid odor of sweaty garment and body.

"Where's Matthews?"

"Here he is!"

"Bully for you, old man!"

Some had not been enabled to congratulate him before.

"That certainly was a great run of yours."

Even the enemy were congratulating him.

"'Clar to goodness, Missuh Matthews, nevuh did see nobody run laik that. Look like you mus' a-had a watuhmelon 'stead of a football." It was Joe, the negro rubber, energetically kneading him upon the slab. "Guess they gwine to make you cap'n next yeah. Heah 'em talkin' about it 'foh you come in."

Captain! Captain of the varsity! Ah, he *must* have made a run, then!

What was the matter, now? Laughter—fresh laughter, and cheers mingled. And Captain Fudge approaching, in bath robe, extending a huge bunch of purple chrysanthemums tied with a broad, gray satin ribbon.

"Kid left them at the gym door, with particular instructions that you were to have them at once. Said they were from a lady. Where d' you want to hold 'em—on your stomach, or between your toes?"

"Aw, get out with you. Ouch! Quit! Stick 'em some place, will you?" pleaded Matthews, abashed.

"Wait—here's a card." Captain Fudge was relentlessly examining. "'Waldo William Bresh.' Uh-uh—scratched out. Other side, maybe. M. H.—huh! Who's 'M. H.'?"

Yes, *she* had sent them! She must have carried them to the game—perhaps she had worn them, on her breast—and have impulsively dispatched them out of her keeping to his! Very likely Professor Bresh had given them to her; but she had not scrupled even to use his card—borrowed in haste—as well as his flowers. And his name was scratched out—significant, eh?

"You take them, Joe," directed Matthews helplessly. "They're pricking me. Ouch! Thanks, Fudge; but get out. Skidoo! And—aw—put 'em in water, will you, Joe?"

"'Peahs laik some lady mus' think a awful lot of Missuh Matthews, givin'

him sech a boo-ky as this," murmured the rubber admiringly.

Man who won the game, prospective varsity captain, hero—and her hero! That was he, Matthews. Well, well! He sighed contentedly. He sighed again, in a smothered fashion; he was sleepy—but he must wake up—thunder, Joe, don't rub so hard—not so hard, man—and take those chrysanthemums, even her chysanthemums, out from under—didn't want his head lying on them—they hurt—wanted to see them, though—eh, what? M-Marian? Miss Howland? She down here? Beside him—to visit? Why—no. Somebody all in white. He blinked.

"Hello," he said stupidly. "What's up? Where's Joe? This isn't the gym, is it?"

"No," said the nurse, smiling. "You're in the hospital."

"How'd I get here? Last thing I remember I was in the gym, being rubbed, after the game."

"Were you?" she answered indulgently. "Dear me; then you don't remember being hurt and being picked up unconscious? That's remarkable, isn't it?"

He weakly pondered. It seemed to him that she was bantering.

"Eleven to ten?" he queried, as for confirmation.

"Sixteen to five, I think," she corrected mildly.

"But we beat!" he asserted. "Certainly we did—eleven to ten."

"I think not," she persisted, with gentle deprecation—the nurse's way. "I'll see."

She noiselessly vanished. Presently she returned as noiselessly.

"Sixteen to five," she declared. "The other side beat. I'm sorry."

"Then I didn't make a touchdown? What?"

Just then a doctor came in.

"No talking, Miss Smith," he warned.

"But he wants to know if he made a—a touchdown," she answered.

"I should say not," rapped the doctor almost brusquely. "Forget it. Here—stick this in your mouth." He inserted a thermometer under Matthews' tongue. "The very first pass made you you fumbled." Evidently the doctor understood football better than did the nurse. "Then, before you even got started, they tackled you behind the line so hard they took the ball away from you—frightfully vicious tacklers, those fellows—and their right half ran through our whole eleven and scored, and they kicked goal. That ended it. Sixteen to five. Awful! But you were left lying there dead to the world, on the line of scrimmage; slight concussion of the brain; and we had to send the ambulance for you. Take his temperature reading in a moment, will you, Miss Smith? I'll be in again shortly."

Matthews, flat on his back, sucked the thermometer. A tear slowly gathered in his eye, and trickled, unheeded by him.

No hero; no man who won the game; no next year's captain; all, all was false, then, even——

At a sound the nurse suddenly turned, and stepped swiftly to the threshold. Therefrom she bore to the bed a huge bunch of purple chrysanthemums tied with a broad, gray satin ribbon.

"For you," she smiled. "The card says, 'Marian Howland.' Oh, yes; Miss Howland. Such a pretty girl! Shall I put them in a vase? Aren't they beautiful?"

He nodded. He was glad that the thermometer prevented speech, for he felt curiously weak and watery. A lump was in his throat. Silly ass, what was he crying about now? The nurse would think him blubbering because he hadn't made the touchdown—wouldn't she? Big baby, to bawl over a bunch of chrysanthemums! Phew! But they were sure 'nough 'mums, with her card on them—weren't they? *They* would not suddenly vanish.

No hero—nope; no "man who won the game"—nope; no next year's captain—nope; all his dream might be false, except—God bless *her,* she was truth. She had not failed him. And secure in his Eternal Feminine, Youth fell asleep.

A Self-Constituted Executioner

By Edgar Beecher Bronson

Author of "Circus Day at Mancos," "In Closed Territory," Etc.

If you are looking for trouble you don't have to go very far to find it. In this story—which like all of Mr. Bronson's is a picture drawn from actual life—a rugged Westerner spends his life looking for trouble; and as he plays the double rôle of judge and executioner, you can guess that the day's work is pretty well crowded with excitement. There is an unforgettable scene where this courageous son of the West jumps into the limelight for a brief moment as a parson, and conducts the most unique service ever held.

OME think it fair to give a man warnin' you intend to kill him on sight, an' then get right down to business as soon as you meet. But this ain't no equal chance for both. The man that sees his enemy first has the advantage, for the other's sure to be more or less rattled.

"Others consider it a square deal to stan' back to back with drawn pistols, to walk five paces apart, an' then swing and shoot. But even this way is open to objections. While both may be equally brave an' determined, one may be blamed nervous-like an' excitable, while the other is cool and deliberate; one may be a better shot than the other, or one may have bad eyes.

"I tell you, gentlemen, none o' these deals are fair; they are murderous. If you want to kill a man in a neat and gentlemanly way, that will give both an equal show for life, let both be put in a narrow hole in the ground they can't git out of, their left arms securely tied together, their right hands holdin' bowie knives, and let them cut, and cut, and *cut,* till one is down."

His heavy brows contracted into a fierce frown; his black eyes narrowed and glittered balefully; his surging blood reddened the bronzed cheeks.

"Let them cut, I say, *cut* to a finish. That's fightin', and fightin' dead fair. Ah!"—and the hard lines of the scarred face softened into a look of infinite longing and regret—"if only I could find a man with nerve enough to fight me that way!"

The speaker was Mr. Clay Allison, formerly of Cimarron, later domiciled at Pope's Crossing. His listeners were cowboys. The scene was a round-up camp on the banks of the Pecos River near the mouth of Rocky Arroyo.

Mr. Allison was not dilating upon a theory. On the contrary, he was eminently a man of practice, especially in the matters of which he was speaking.

Indeed, he was probably the most expert taker of human life that ever heightened the prevailing dull colors of a frontier community. Early in his career, the impression became general that his favorite tint was crimson.

And yet Mr. Allison was in no sense an assassin. I never knew him to kill a man whom the community could not very well spare.

While engaged as a ranchman in raising cattle, he found more agreeable occupation for the greater part of his

time in thinning out the social weeds that are apt to grow quite too luxuriantly for the general good in new Western settlements.

His work was not done as an officer of the law, either. It was rather a self-imposed task, in which he performed, at least to his own satisfaction, the double functions of judge and executioner.

And in the unwritten code governing his decisions, all offenses had a common penalty—death.

Mr. Allison was born with a passion for fighting, and he indulged the passion until it became a mania.

The louder the bullets whistled, the redder the gleaming blades grew, the more he loved it.

Yet, no knight of old that rode with King Arthur was ever a more chivalrous enemy. He hated a foul blow as much as many of his contemporaries loved "to get the drop"—which meant taking your opponent unawares and at hopeless disadvantage. In fact, in most cases, he actually carried chivalry so far as to warn the doomed man, a week or two in advance, of the precise day and hour when he might expect to die. And, as Mr. Allison was known to be most scrupulous in standing to his word, this gave the victim plenty of time to settle up his affairs and to prepare to cross the last divide.

Thus the estates of gentlemen who happened to incur Mr. Allison's disapproval were usually left in excellent condition, and gave little trouble to the probate courts.

Of course, the gentlemen receiving these warnings were under no obligations to await Mr. Allison's pleasure.

Some suddenly discovered that they had imperative business in other and remote parts of the country.

Others were so anxious to save him unnecessary trouble that they frequented trails he was known to travel, and lay sometimes for hours and days awaiting him, making themselves as comfortable as possible in the meantime behind some convenient bowlder or tall nopal, or in the shady recesses of a mesquite thicket.

But they might as well have saved all this bother, for the result was the same. Mr. Allison could always spare the time to journey even from New Mexico to Montana, where it was necessary to the fulfillment of a promise to do so.

And to those who were impatient and sought him out in advance, he was ever obliging, and ready to meet them where and when and how they pleased. It was all the same to him.

To avoid annoying legal complications, he was known, more than once, deliberately to give his opponent the first shot.

In the early eighties, a band of horse rustlers were playing great havoc among the saddle stock in Northeastern New Mexico. It was chiefly through Mr. Allison's industry and accurate marksmanship that their numbers were reduced below a convenient working majority. The leader vowed vengeance on Allison. One day they met unexpectedly in the stage ranch at the crossing of the Cimarron.

Mr. Allison invited the rustler to take a drink. The invitation was accepted. It was remarked by the bystanders that while they were drinking neither seemed to take any especial interest in the brazen pictures that constituted a feature of the Cimarron bar and were the pride of its proprietor.

The next manœuvre in the game was a proposition by Mr. Allison that they retire to the dining room and have some oysters. Unable to plead any other engagement to dine, the rustler accepted. As they sat down at table, both agreed that their pistols felt heavy about their waists, and each drew his weapon from the scabbard and laid it on his knees.

While the Cimarron ranch was noted for the best cooking on the trail, other gentlemen at dinner seemed oddly indifferent to its delicacies, nervously gulped down a few mouthfuls, and then slipped quietly out of the room, leaving loaded plates.

Presently Mr. Allison dropped a fork on the floor—*perhaps* by accident—and bent as if to pick it up. An open-

ing in the guard he could not resist, the rustler grabbed the pistol lying in his lap and raised it quickly, but in doing so struck the muzzle beneath the edge of the table—an instant's delay. It was, however, enough; Allison had pitched sideways to the floor, and, firing *beneath* the table, converted a bad rustler into a good one.

Dodge City used to be one of the hottest places on the Texas trail. It was full of thugs and desperadoes of the worst sort, come to prey upon the hundreds of cowboys who were paid off there. This money had to be kept in Dodge at any cost. Usually the boys were easy game. What money the saloons failed to get was generally gambled off against brace games of faro or monte. And those who would neither drink nor play were waylaid, knocked down, and robbed.

On one occasion, when the Hunter & Evans "Jinglebob" outfits were in town, they objected to some of these enforced levies as unreasonably heavy.

A pitched battle on the streets resulted.

Many of the boys were young and inexperienced, and they were getting quite the worst of it when Clay Allison happened along and took a hand.

The fight did not last much longer.

When over, it was discovered that various of Dodge's most active citizens had been removed from their field of usefulness.

For the next day or two, "Boot Hill" —the local graveyard—was a scene of unusual activity.

From all this it fell out that, a few days later, when Clay Allison rode alone out of Dodge, returning home, he was ambushed a few miles from town by three men, and shot from his horse. Crippled too badly to resist, he lay as if dead. Thinking their work well done, the three men came out of hiding, kicked and cursed him, shot two or three more holes in him, and rode back to town. But Allison, who had not even lost consciousness, had recognized them. A few hours later, the driver of a passing wagon found and hauled him into town.

After lingering many weeks between life and death, Allison recovered.

As soon as they heard that he was convalescing, the three who had attacked him wound up their affairs and fled the town.

When able to travel, Allison sold his ranch.

Questioned by his friends as to his plans, he finally admitted that he felt it a duty to hunt down the men who had ambushed him; remarked that he feared they might bushwhack some one else if they were not removed.

Number One of the three men he located in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Cheyenne had then become a law-abiding community, and Allison could not afford to take any chances of court complications that would interfere with the completion of his work. He therefore spent several days in covertly watching the habits of his adversary. From the knowledge thus gained, he was able, one morning, suddenly to turn a street corner and confront Number One.

Without the least suspicion that Allison was in the country, Number One, knowing that his life hung by a thread, jerked his pistol and fired on the instant. As Allison had shrewdly calculated, his enemy was so nervous that his shot flew wild. Number One did not get a second shot.

At the inquest several witnesses of the affray swore that Allison did not even draw until after the other had fired.

Several weeks later, Number Two was found in Tombstone, Arizona, a town of the good old frontier sort that had little use for coroners and juries, so the fighting was half fair. Half an hour after landing from the stage coach, Allison encountered his man in a gambling house.

Number Two remained in Tombstone —permanently—while Mr. Allison resumed his travels by the evening coach.

The hunt for Number Three lasted several months. Allison followed him relentlessly from place to place, through half a dozen States and Territories, until he was located on a ranch near Spearfish, Dakota.

They met, at last, one afternoon, within the shadow of the Devil's Tower.

In the duel that ensued, Allison's horse was killed under him. This occasioned him no particular inconvenience, however, for he found that Number three's horse, after being given a few hours' rest, was able to carry him into Deadwood, where he caught the Sidney stage.

With this task finished, Mr. Allison was able to return to commercial pursuits. He settled at Pope's Crossing on the Pecos River, in New Mexico, bought cattle, and stocked the adjacent range. Pecos City, the nearest town, lay fifty miles to the south.

Started as a "front camp" during the construction of the Texas Pacific Railway in '80, for five or six years Pecos contrived to rock along without any of the elaborate municipal machinery deemed essential to the government and safety of urban communities in the effete East. It had neither council, mayor, nor peace officer.

An early experiment in government was discouraging.

In 1883, the Texas Pacific station agent was elected mayor. His name was Ewing, a little man with fierce whiskers and mild, blue eyes. Two nights after the election, a gang of boys from the "Hash Knife" outfit were in town; and, fearing circumscription of some of their privileges, the election did not have their approval.

Gleaming out of the darkness fifty yards away from the Lone Wolf Saloon, the light of Mayor Ewing's office window offered a most tempting target.

What followed was very natural—in Pecos.

The mayor was sitting at his table receiving train orders, when suddenly a bullet smashed the telegraph key beside his hand, and other balls whistled through the room, bearing him a message he had no trouble in reading. Rushing out into the darkness, he spent the night in the brush; and, toward morning, boarded an eastbound freight train. Mayor Ewing had abdicated. The railway company soon obtained another station agent, but it was some years before the town got another mayor.

On Pecos carnival nights like this, when some of the cowboys were in town, prudent people, like Charlie Eddy and myself, used to sleep on the floor of Van Slyke's store with bags of grain piled round our blankets two tiers deep, for no Pecos house walls were more than inch boards.

At this early period of its history, the few wandering advance agents of the Gospel who occasionally visited Pecos were not well received. They were not abused; they were simply ignored. When not otherwise occupied, the average Pecosite had too much whittling on hand to find time to "'tend meetin'"; of this every pine dry-goods box in the town bore mute evidence, its fair sides covered with innumerable rude carvings cut by aimless hands.

This prevailing indifference to religion shocked Mr. Allison. As opportunity offered, he tried to remedy it; and, as far as his evangelical work went, it was successful.

One Tuesday morning, about ten o'clock, he walked into the Lone Wolf Saloon, laid two pistols on the end of the bar next the front door, and remarked to Red Dick, the bartender, that he intended to turn the saloon into a church for a couple of hours, and did not want any drinks sold or cards thrown during the services.

Taking his stand just within the doorway, pistol in hand, Mr. Allison began to assemble his congregation. The first comer was Billy Jansen, the leading merchant of the town.

As he was passing the door, Clay remarked: "Good mornin', Mr. Jansen; won't you please step inside? Religious services will be held here shortly, an' I reckon you'll be useful in the choir."

The only reply to Billy's protest of urgent business was a gesture that made Billy think going to church would be the greatest pleasure he could have that morning.

Mr. Allison never played favorites at any game, and so all passers were stopped—merchants, railway men, gamblers, thugs, cowboys, freighters—all were stopped, and made to enter the saloon.

The least furtive movement to draw a gun or to approach the back door received prompt attention from the alert evangelist that quickly restored order in the congregation.

When fifty or sixty men had been brought into this improvised fold, Mr. Allison closed the door and faced about.

"Fellers," he said, "this meetin' bein' held on the Pecos, I reckon we'll open her by singin' 'Shall We Gather At the River.' Of course, we're already gathered; but the song sort o' fits. No gammon now, fellers; everybody sing that knows her."

The result was discouraging. Few in the audience knew any hymn, much less this one. Only three or four managed to hoarsely drawl through two verses.

The hymn finished—as far as anybody could sing it—Mr. Allison said:

"Now, fellers, we'll pray; everybody down!"

Only a few knelt. Among the congregation were some who regarded the affair as sacrilegious, and others of the independent frontier type were unaccustomed to dictation. However, a slight narrowing of the cold, black eyes and a significant sweep of the six-shooter brought every man of them to their knees, with heads bowed over faro layouts and on monte tables.

"Oh, Lord," began Allison, "this yere's a mighty bad neck o' woods, an' I reckon You know it. Fellers don' think enough o' their souls to build a church, an' when a pa'son comes here they don' treat him half white. Oh, Lord, make these fellers see that when they gits caught in the final round-up an' drove over the last divide, they don' stan' no sort o' show to git to stay on the heavenly ranch 'nless they believes, an' builds a house to pray an' preach in. Right here I subscribes a hundred dollars to build a church, an' if airy one o' these yere fellers don' ante up accordin' to his means, oh, Lord, make it Your pers'n'l business to see that he wears the devil's brand and earmark an' never gits another drop o' good spring water.

"Of course, I allow You knows I don' sport no wings, myself; but I want to do what's right ef You'll sort o' give me a shove the proper way.

"An' one thing I want You to understan': Clay Allison's got a fast horse an' is to'lable handy with his rope, an' he's goin' to run these fellers into Your corral, even if he has to rope an' drag 'em there. Amen! Everybody git up!"

While he prayed in the most reverent tone he could command, and while his attitude was one of simple supplication, Mr. Allison never removed his keen eyes from the congregation.

"Reckon we'll sing again, boys, an' I want a little more of it. Le's see what you-all knows."

At length, six or eight rather sheepishly owned to knowing "Old Hundred," and it was sung.

Then the sermon was in order.

"Fellers," he began, "my ole mammy used to tell me that the only show to shake the devil off your trail was to believe everythin' the Bible says. What yer mammy tells you's bound to be right, dead right; so I think I'll take the sentiment o' this yere round-up on believin'. O' course, as a square man, I'm boun' to admit the Bible tells some pow'ful queer tales, onlike anythin' we uns strikes nowdays. Take that tale about a fish swallerin' a feller named Jonah; why, a fish 't could swaller a man'd have to be as big in the barrel as the Pecos River is wide, an' have a openin' in his face bigger'n Phantom Lake Cave. Nobody on the Pecos ever see such a fish. But I wish you fellers to distinctly understan' it's a fact! I believes it; does you? Every feller that believes a fish swallered Jonah, hold up his right hand!"

It is sad to have to admit that only two or three hands were raised.

"Well, I'll be durned!" the evangelist continued. "You *air* tough cases.

That's what's the matter with you; you are shy on faith. You fellers has got to be saved, an' to be saved you got to believe, an' believe hard; an' I'm a-goin' to *make* you. Now hear *me*, an' mind you don' forget it's Clay Allison talkin' to you. I tells you that when that thar fish had don' swallerin' Jonah, he swum aroun' fer a hull hour lookin' to see if thar was a show to pick up any o' Jonah's family or fren's. Now what I tells you I reckon you're all bound to believe. Every feller that believes that Jonah was jes' only a sort of a snack fer the fish hold up his right hand, an' if any feller don' believe it this yere ol' gun o' mine will finish the argiment."

All hands went up.

And so the "sermon" ran on for an hour, a crude homily full of rude metaphor, with little of sentiment or pleading, severely didactic, mandatory as if spoken in a dungeon of the Inquisition.

When Red Dick passed the hat among the congregation for a subscription to build a church, the contribution was general and generous. Many who, early in the meeting, were full of rage over the restraint, and vowing to themselves to kill Allison the first good chance they got, finished by thinking he meant all right and had taken about the only practicable means "to git the boys to 'tend meetin'."

In the town of Toyah, twenty miles west of Pecos, a gentleman named Jep Clayton set the local spring styles in six-shooters and bowie knives, and settled the hash of anybody who ventured to question them.

A reckless bully, he ruled the town like he owned it.

One day, John McCullough, Allison's brother-in-law and ranch foreman, had business in Toyah. Clayton had heard of Allison, but knew little about him. Drunk and quarrelsome, he hunted up McCullough, called him every abusive name he could think of before a crowd, and then suggested that if he did not like it he might send over his brother-in-law, Allison, who was said to be a gun fighter.

A mild and peaceable man himself, McCullough avoided a difficulty, and returned to Pecos.

Two days later a lone horseman rode into Toyah, stopped at Youngblood's store, tied his horse, and went in. Approaching the group of loafers curled up on boxes at the rear of the store, he inquired:

"Can any of you gentlemen tell me ef a gentleman named Clayton—Jep Clayton—is in town, an' where I can find him?"

They replied that he had been in the store an hour before, and was probably near by.

As the lone horseman walked out of the door, one of the loungers remarked:

"I believe that's Clay Allison; an', ef it is, it's all up with Jep."

And he slipped out and gave Jep warning—told him Allison was in town, that he had known him years before, and that Jep had better quit town or say his prayers, concluding:

"You don' barked up the wrong tree, this time, sure."

Allison went on from one saloon to another, at each making the same polite inquiry for Mr. Clayton's whereabouts. At last, come out on the street, Allison met a party of eight men, a crowd Clayton had gathered, and repeated his inquiry. A man stepped out of the group and said:

"My name's Clayton, an' I reckon yours is Allison. Look here, Mr. Allison, this is all a mistake. I——"

"Why, what's a mistake? Didn't you meet Mr. McCullough the other day?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you abuse him shamefully?"

"Well, yes; but——"

"Didn't you send me a invite to come over here?"

"Well, yes, I did; but it was a mistake, Mr. Allison. I was drunk. It was whisky talkin'; nothin' more. I'm terrible sorry. It was jes' whisky talk."

"Whisky talk, was it? Well, Mr. Clayton, let's step in the saloon here and get some whisky, an' see if it won't set you goin' again. I *believe* I'd ad-

mire hearin' jes' a few words o' your whisky talk."

They entered a saloon. For an hour Clayton was plied with whisky, taunted and jeered, until those who had admired him shrank away in disgust, and those who had feared him laughed in enjoyment of his humiliation.

But no amount of whisky could rouse him that day.

Allison's scarred, impassive face, low, quiet tones and glittering black eyes held him cowed. The terror of Toyah had found his master—and knew it.

At last, in utter disgust, Allison continued:

"Mr. Clayton, your invite brought me twenty miles to meet a gun fighter, but I find you such a cur that if ever we meet again I'll lash you into strips with a bull whip."

A month later, Mr. Clayton was killed by his own brother-in-law, Grant Tinnin, one of the quiet, good men of the country who usually scored in any real emergency.

"I wonder how it will all end?" Allison used often to remark while lying idly staring into the camp fire. "Of course, I know I can't keep up this sort o' thing; some one's sure to get me. An' I'd jes' give anything in the world to know how I'm goin' to die—by pistol or knife."

It turned out that fate had decreed other means for his removal.

One day, Allison and his brother-in-law, John McCullough, had a serious quarrel. Allison left the ranch and rode into town—to think it over. In his later years, killing became such a mania with him that his best friend could never feel entirely safe against his deadly temper; the least difference might provoke a collision.

McCullough was, therefore, not greatly surprised to get a letter from Allison a few days later, sent out by special messenger, telling him that Allison would reach the ranch late in the afternoon of the next day, and would kill him on sight.

Early in the morning of the appointed day, Allison left town in a covered hack. He had been drinking heavily, and had whisky with him. About halfway between town and the ranch, he overtook George Larramore, a freighter, seated out in the sun on top of his heavy load.

"Hello, George!" called Allison. "Mighty hot up there, ain't it?"

"Howd'y, Mr. Allison? I don' mind the heat; I'm used to it," answered Larramore.

"George," called Allison, after driving on a short distance, "'pears to me the good things o' this world ain't equally divided. I don't see why you should sit up there roasting in the sun an' me down here in the shade o' the hack. George, we'll jes' even things a little right here. You crawl down off that load an' jump into the hack, an' I'll get up there an' drive your team."

"Pow'ful good o' you, Mr. Allison, but——"

"Crawl down, I say, George; it's Clay tellin' you!"

And the change was made without further delay.

Five miles farther up the road, John McCullough and two friends lay in ambush all that day and far into the night, with ready Winchesters, awaiting Allison. But he never came.

Shortly after taking his seat on top of the high load in the broiling sun, plodding slowly along in the dust and heat, Allison was nodding drowsily, when suddenly a protruding mesquite root gave the wagon a sharp jolt that plunged Clay headlong into the road, where, before he could rise, the great wheels crunched across his neck.

The Kings' Club

By Robert Rudd Whiting

There is an awfully funny Irishman in this story. He makes you laugh, but—God bless him!—he has a big heart. Like all good Irishmen he has royal blood in his veins. That's why he is a member of the Kings' Club. It is a gay, happy-go-lucky sort of tale; and when you have read it you will want more from Mr. Whiting, who is new to "Popular" readers.

(*A Complete Novelette*)

SIX days in the week, from Friday to Wednesday, Le Coq d'Argent differed little from hundreds of other small Parisian restaurants. The *plats du jour* were a trifle better than the daily specialties at most places, possibly; and the fountain in the centre of the room, with its monotonous splashing against the somewhat frayed and faded embankment of artificial palms, undoubtedly appealed to the finer senses of the diners.

But these attractions in themselves were insufficient to justify the overbearing attitude of the great silvered rooster perched on the top of the fountain. With head thrown proudly back, his breast seemed swollen nigh unto bursting with the exultant "cock-a-doodle-doo" that never passed his wide-opened beak.

But if the silent exultation of the silvered rooster seemed without reason the rest of the week, Thursday, the one day, furnished ample excuse for his gloating demeanor all other days. Thursday's *plat du jour* was in itself sufficient. It was one of those delicious French mysteries, the mere outline of which would bring pangs of hunger at the close of a beefsteak dinner.

On the bill of fare François called it "ragout au Coq d'Argent." Barney O'Brian called it "dappled gray."

"At most Frinch resthaurants," Barney used to explain, "'tis plain horse meat they do be givin' ye from one ind of the week to the other. 'Tis variety thot gives this place its color. Likewise color thot gives it its variety. Commincin' Friday, we have it

> Black, an' roan; white, an' bay;
> Chestnut, piebald, dappled gray.

An' the dappled gray has the rest of thim beat in a gallop, for 'tis bound to be young an' tendher. They lose their dapples with age. Encore du ragout, Gaston."

Nor was it the ragout alone that made Thursday the day of days at Le Coq d'Argent; nor the fresh-scented wax on François' mustaches; nor even the cameo of a full-rigged ship that rose and fell tempestuously on madame's ample bosom. An air of deep mystery permeated the whole place Thursdays. Certain patrons, who, during the rest of the week, dined at separate tables, and showed a lack of interest in each other that would have been marked even in British fellow travelers, on Thursday nights at dinner hour used to straggle through the room with ostentatious aimlessness and mount the creaky old stairs in the rear.

One of these Thursdays, several min-

utes after the arrival of the others, a frail little man, with pale-blue eyes and thin, straw-colored mustaches, entered the place.

Scarcely pausing for a hurried *"Bon soir, madame; bon soir, m'sieur,"* to François and his wife, he hastened through the room.

Climbing the stairs in the rear, he rapped sharply on a battered old door.

After a slight delay, a childish voice from within piped up: "Who seeks admittance to our august presence?"

The little man drew himself up proudly.

"'Tis I, Pierre IV, surnamed le Terrible, rightful ruler of Lugania, Prince of the Order of the Iron Star, First Lord of the Order of the Defenders of the Golden Garter, Most Worshipful Commander of the Order of the Knights of the Black Horse, Most Gracious——"

"Cut it out, Peter," interrupted a voice with a rich Irish brogue. "The soup's gettin' cold."

There was a brief rattling of chains, and the door was swung open with a dignity usually only associated with "massive portals." A diminutive French lad in buttons' uniform, with two brass crowns at the collar, bowed low, and waved toward a table, at which a dozen or so men were already seated.

"Sire," announced the boy, in as impressive a voice as he could muster, "the throne of Lugania awaits you."

Pierre le Terrible advanced to the one vacant chair at the table, and cautiously seated himself. The chair creaked ominously.

"Aisy there, me terrible Peter," Barney O'Brian warned him from his seat at the head of the table. "Yer throne seems to be tottherin' a bit. We must have the carpenter in to take a look at it. Think of what it means to Lugania. In the meantime, to the soup. For even kings must eat."

Kings!

The secret is out. What would the regular patrons of Le Coq d'Argent downstairs not have given to know that true royalty was dining directly above their midst? What would designing American mothers not have given to secure the entrée to that little kingdom of kingdomless kings? Yes, and what would not the spying minions of all the governments of Europe have given to know the exact location of the Kings' Club—of Les Rois du Rue de la Couronne?

As to this last, it is hard to say. Estimates differed. Louis XXI, of France, for example, and Pierre IV (le Terrible), of Lugania, put the prices on their respective heads at a much higher figure than did Barney O'Brian, claimant to the realms of Brian Boru, or than even Jean Godfrey, collateral descendant of the greatest of all the kings of Jerusalem.

The long, narrow room of the Kings' Club, with its single window opening on the rear of the house, was anything but palatial. Whether the iron chain across the door was intended primarily to bar out intruders or to prevent the utter collapse of the door would be hard to say. Nor was Pierre's chair the only throne that showed signs of tottering. Every one of them seemed somewhat the worse for the weight of nations that bore down upon their occupants.

In fact, the room would have been downright dingy were it not for the gorgeous paper with which François had covered the walls. This was a flowered trellis design, over the top of which, at equidistant intervals, blackbirds fluttered with drill-like similarity. There happened to be just four-and-twenty of these blackbirds; and Barney O'Brian insisted, despite François' indignant denials, that they were in some way symbolic of the dainty dishes that were set before the kings.

Above the blackbirds, one behind each place at the table, hung brilliantly colored coats of arms, whose tarnished gilt frames indicated that flies are no respecters of royalty.

Barney O'Brian, a big, rawboned man, whose twinkling, gray eyes gave the lie to the set expression of his mouth, had won the head of the table for himself and Ireland with the un-

answerable argument that his claim antedated all others, the late Brian Boru having been slain by the Danes in the battle of Clontarf as far back as 1014.

On his right, following the rule of precedence, sat Jean Godfrey, whose collateral ancestor ceased reigning in Jerusalem as early as 1187.

On the left of O'Brian sat Alphonse Paliole, Byzantine emperor by self-interpreted divine right, struggling artist by force of human circumstances.

And so it went on down the table, winding up at the foot with Alexander Petrovitch, who had been actual king of Seravia until his overthrow two years before, when his predecessor in the Kings' Club, Peter Alexandrovitch, had been called by the people to rule in his stead. It was Alexandrovitch, himself, who, shortly after ascending the throne, had written to Barney O'Brian, magnanimously recommending his rival's name to the Kings' Club for consideration.

Alexander Petrovitch was a gloomy little man, with a beard about the color and texture of corn silk, and a dignity out of all proportion to his size.

This same beard and dignity were the cause of a bitter hatred which he bore Barney O'Brian. A few weeks after his first appearance in the club, he had requested a temporary suspension of his dues, owing to a slight financial embarrassment pending the settlement of a pension that he felt his country should grant him.

Barney O'Brian, who had been imbibing rather freely of American corn whisky, not because he really liked it, but rather as a subtle compliment to the house of Bourbon, gazed fixedly at Petrovitch's beard.

"Of course, if ye have no money, ——" mused Barney. "But what did ye do with all the money the quane dowager must have given ye for not shavin' until ye were twinty-five? The pity it is thot ye can't mortgage thot birds' tinement!"

"How?" demanded Petrovitch hotly. "How?"

He drew a soiled glove from one of his pockets, and flung it dramatically at the Irishman's feet.

"I give you choice of weapons," he hissed.

Barney very gingerly picked up the glove and tossed it back.

"Keep it," he said. "Keep yer glove. If, by any chance, 'tis the truth ye're shpeakin', ye need it worse'n I do. Ye ask me to be so far forgettin' the dignity of me royal station as to stake me life against yours? Why should I put up so much to gain so little? An', as for the choice of weapons, me dear Qu'est-ce-que-c'est - que - vitch" —Barney's contempt was magnificent—"a monarch with any pretensions might be expected to know thot kings fight only with armies."

This last elicited a murmur of general approval from the onlooking royalty.

Later that evening, when Pierre le Terrible and Barney O'Brian were on their way home, the heir to Kincora Castle confided to the rightful ruler of Lugania in this wise:

"Troth, an' if I'd ever had the slightest suspicion of the contimptible nature of thot baste of a Petrovitch, I'd niver have conthributed one sou toward the railroad fare of poor Alexandrovitch when the well-meanin' but misguided Seravian pathriots recalled him to his own."

II.

Louis XXI, the last hope of France, if France had only known it, had more to fear than the average monarch of the Kings' Club. In addition to the present republic, he had the Orleanists to guard against, for the mere existence of a lineal descendant of Louis XVII naturally wiped out the pretensions of the latter faction.

His life was one of constant vigilance. Once, while sitting outside of the Café de la Paix, he noticed a clean-shaven man with black, beady eyes regarding him intently from the next table.

"Detectives," was his alarming thought.

He left his absinthe untasted, and hurried to his lodgings. When he next emerged, his beautiful, blond hair, beard, and mustaches were dyed a commonplace brown. For France, no sacrifice could be too great.

Three days later, sipping his grenadine way out at the Café Madrid, he had an uncomfortable feeling that some one was staring at him. He turned, and met those same black, beady eyes. Moreover, a tantalizing, sarcastic smile played about the corners of his tormenter's mouth.

Louis rushed for a passing fiacre.

"*Allez vite!*" he urged the driver. "And double *pour boire* if you elude my dastardly pursuer!"

When next seen upon the streets, his hair and beard were fiery red. To what heights will a true king not rise to save his people!

Under his new colors, Louis passed unnoticed for almost a week. But, just as he had begun to congratulate himself upon outwitting "that pig of a spy," he was destined to meet with the greatest shock of all.

It was in the Alcazar d'Eté. Louis was anxiously fumbling through his pockets in search of the price of the raspberry sirup and water that the waiter had just brought him.

He felt a light tap on his shoulder, and looked behind him.

"If m'sieur will permit——"

"*Sacré bleu!*"

'Twas the same hireling wretch.

Flinging at the waiter the two-franc piece that he had at last found in an upper coat pocket, Louis rushed up the aisle and elbowed his way through the astonished crowd at the entrance out into the street. Long before the gesticulating waiters and officials had come to any definite conclusion as to whether he was pickpocket, maniac, or simple American tourist, Louis was bolting the door of his room.

He sat on the edge of his bed, his hands pressed to his temples, trying to reflect calmly upon the evening's adventure. This cur of a detective who had been following him had said, "If m'sieur will permit——." If m'sieur would permit what? Then he suddenly remembered that the man had started to take something from his inside pocket. What was it? An awful explanation of the affair flashed through Louis' mind.

"A warrant!" he groaned. "A warrant for me, Louis XXI, Most Christian King—— But, stop! I must be calm."

For several minutes, he sat in silence, as though considering some weighty question. Then, with a quick gesture, he arose, strode to the bureau, and searched in the top drawer until he found a small bottle of black, poisonous-looking fluid.

"It is decided," he said, drawing the cork. "The cause demands it."

Next morning, when Louis went out, even the concierge had difficulty in associating the gentleman of the light blue eyes and purplish black beard with the somewhat eccentric lodger of the third floor rear. When she did recognize him, she merely shrugged her shoulders and went on with her knitting. For, was it not the middle of June—the season when the madness of summer creeps into the veins of all good Parisians? And who was she—a simple concierge—that she should dictate the form of insanity that her lodgers were to assume? If they wished to dye their beards droll colors, why, was that her affair?

All this happened two weeks before the dinner at which we left our friends, the other kings.

In those two weeks, Louis' beard had grown so that about an inch of the natural pale yellow intervened between his skin and the rich purplish black of the dye. At first glance one gathered the startling impression that the beard, instead of growing directly out of his face, had taken root an inch or so away from it.

In fact, Barney O'Brian had had to look twice before he could bring himself to taste his specially prepared American cocktail.

Louis seemed ill at ease all through dinner. He glanced apprehensively at the window from time to time, and

started violently every time the speaking tube whistled to notify the buttons that their august majesties' next course was on the dumbwaiter.

"What is it, Louis?" ventured Godfrey of Jerusalem, when the coffee was brought on. "Your most Christian majesty seems to be laboring under unusually weighty affairs of state this evening."

"Don't tell me that that hellhound of a spy has penetrated this latest disguise!" Pierre le Terrible exclaimed incredulously.

Louis dismissed the idea with a gesture. A sight of relief went around the table.

"No, no. Not that. This time, the police. This evening, as I was turning into the Rue de la Couronne, the *sergent de ville* at the crossing stared at me curiously. When I passed him I noticed——"

Louis broke off with a nervous start as the speaking tube whistled.

"Ye must have been mistaken," suggested Barney O'Brian. "How could they know of yer existence, even? Sure an' all the historians are now agreed that the dauphin, Louis XVII, died in prison."

"And why are these historians all so agreed?" demanded Louis excitedly. "Ah, ha! They are bribed by these government canaille to throw me off my guard."

"But how on earth could they ever have found ye out?" persisted Barney. "Ye've kept the proofs of yer claims that secret thot even some of yer dearest friends have their doubts—er—thot is——"

"Ha!" muttered Alexander Petrovitch from the foot of the table. "He doubts the word of a Louis."

Louis either did not hear, or else saw fit to ignore this.

"It is beyond doubt," he said decidedly. "When that *sergent de ville* stared, I hoped against hope that perhaps I was mistaken. But, no. When I looked back—would you believe it, my brothers?—he had pointed me out to a confederate, and the two of them were actually laughing—laughing at me, Louis. But let them beware! They will soon find that they have to reckon with a Bourbon."

Barney, remembering his own mystification at the beginning of the meal, was seized with a sudden inspiration.

"I have it," he cried. "Louis, 'twas yer beard."

"Is it possible?" sneered Alexander Petrovitch, scenting another chance for trouble. "He does not even hesitate to ridicule the beard of a Bourbon!"

Barney O'Brian was on his feet.

"Alexander Petrovitch," he said sternly, shaking a warning finger at that discomfited sovereign, "this is the second time to-night thot ye've sought to embroil friendly rulers in open warfare. Now, mark me words: If ever it happens again 'tis me will be immejetly telegraphin' to Peter Alexandrovitch to abdicate in yer favor, an' we'll send ye back to thot unhappy buildin' lot of a counthry ye came from!"

Unable to think of any fitting rejoinder to this terrible threat, Petrovitch was reduced to surly silence. But the life of the gathering had gone, and it was not long before Barney O'Brian directed the collection of the weekly tribute to Le Coq d'Argent of two francs fifty per crowned head.

Barney, at Louis' request, accompanied the Bourbon as far as his lodgings. Neither was very communicative on the way. The Irishman was worried. He was not overproud, as royalty goes, but the awful possibility of ever being called upon to accompany those purplish black whiskers in broad daylight haunted him. He sought some solution of the problem that would not hurt the sensitive feelings of his friend.

"Louis," he said, when they paused in front of the Bourbon's door, "somehow or other, of late, me peace of mind has been gettin' all tangled up in thot beard of yours. I misthrust it. It has been recognized in its natural yellow; it has been seen through an autumnal brown; it has been penethrated in fiery red; and now, even in its present bafflin' hue, its mysthery has again been unraveled."

"All that is too true. But what will you, my dear Bar-r-nee? If yellow, brown, red, and black have failed, in what color then does safety lie?"

"Just so, Louis. Just so. I hesitated to suggest it meself, but since you speak of it——"

Barney solemnly went through the motion of shaving.

Louis sprang back aghast. "You surely do not mean——"

Barney nodded.

"Think of the cause, Louis. An' think of all the martyr kings who have permitted their entire heads to be cut off merely to gratify the whims uv the people. Can a Bourbon refuse to do less than they? Au revoir."

For several moments, Louis stood spellbound with horror. He was brought to himself by the whistled tones of "Garry Owen," floating clear and triumphant from far down the street.

III.

It lacked an hour of noon by the big clock in the American bar of the Grand Hotel. Henri, who concocted those weird mixtures that made Europeans wonder how the American stomach could stand the strain, was polishing up his glasses.

Perched on one of the high stools in front of the bar, resplendent in a white linen suit and a canary-colored shirtwaist, sat the Vicomtesse Antoinette d'Henriot, who, before her marriage to the late vicomte, had lent a helping hand and figure in support of the younger Salvini.

"Henri, one limon squash." She rearranged her coat so as to better display the white embroidered coronet on the pocket of her shirtwaist.

Henri gracefully tossed together the lemon squash and set it in front of her. He gazed thoughtfully at her as she sipped it.

"A penny for your thoughts, Henri."

"Madame la Vicomtesse, a thousand pardons for the impertinence, but I was thinking—er——"

"Shocking, Henri. But what were you thinking?"

"I am serious, madame. It is all right for those others to come here alone, but you, madame, you are different. Your position—but I say too much, perhaps."

The vicomtesse frowned for a moment. Then she smiled.

"Henri, if my good name were only in your keeping, I should no longer be bothered with looking after it. But you are right. It is not well that I should be here without an escort. Your hat, Henri."

Henri, thinking that this last was some new bit of that American slang that the vicomtesse was forever picking up, merely smiled foolishly.

"Your hat, I say," she commanded imperiously. "And also your cane, Henri."

Henri, wondering, hastened to the closet at the end of the bar, and took down his hat and cane. The vicomtesse moved one of the high stools close to her own. She took the hat and cane from Henri, and laid them across the top of it.

"There," she said, reseating herself with an air of great satisfaction. "Now I have an escort."

"But where?" asked the bewildered Henri.

"But where? Why, in the office of the hotel, asking for mail, stupid! He left his hat and cane here until he comes back."

Henri was lost in admiration.

"But what can be keeping him?" the vicomtesse rattled on. "He said he would be only a minute, but he has already been gone half an hour. Ah, perhaps this is he now."

It was not. It was merely Barney O'Brian, who had dropped in for his midday cocktail.

"Hello, Bar-r-nee," the vicomtesse greeted him.

"Well, well, an' if madame isn't the early bur-rd!" returned Barney with an elaborate bow. "I'm fortunate indeed in bein' only a lowly wor-rm when such——" The Irishman had caught sight of Henri's hat and cane, and was glaring at them fiercely.

"Ah, yes," said the vicomtesse gay-

ly, "it is necessary that the worm, too, should be early if it wishes that the early bird should catch it. But, draw up a stool and join us, *mon cher* Bar-r-nee."

"But yer friend——" began Barney coldly.

"Oh, he will not mind. Will he, Henri?"

"I don't like his hat," persisted Barney. This was clearly envy, for the hat was one of those curved brim straws with the heavy black binding that at that time capped the pinnacle of French fashions for men. Henri glowered, and savagely shook an overdose of bitters into the cocktail he was making for the Irishman.

"Show me a hat an' I'll find ye the owner," continued Barney. "I've a picture of this man in me mind's eye now. He's the sort of a man thot every one thinks some one else would consider good-lookin'. An' I'll wager me life he economizes on laundry to buy perfumery for his hair. I know the kind."

"Why, I really believe you are jealous," the vicomtesse told him.

"Jealous? No. A bit disappointed, perhaps," admitted Barney, climbing onto a stool. "I had hoped thot ye might have been willin' to go for a bit of a drive in the Bois, maybe. I had planned for a wee bite of lunch. Some cold salmon an' lettuce an'——"

"I am so sorry, Bar-r-nee. Could we not go another time, perhaps?" pouted the vicomtesse.

"An' champagne——"

"Really?"

"Wid fresh peaches to mash in the glasses."

"No!" She clasped her hands rapturously. "Come, Bar-r-nee. We will start now."

She slid from the stool, and, taking Barney's hand, tried to pull him toward the door.

"But yer friend?" he suggested, with a doubtful glance at the hat and cane.

"My friend? Ah, yes! I had almost forgotten." She took the hat and cane from the stool, and laid them on the bar before Henri. "For the loan of your hat and cane, Henri"—she made a little curtsy—"I am deeply indebted."

Barney stared, first at her, then at Henri, and then back at her again. Suddenly he smiled.

"One minute, 'Toinette, dear. I'd almost forgotten to pay for a matter uv three drinks thot Henri is goin' to mix. An', Henri, I was only jokin' about yer hat; don't put quite so much bitters in mine this time."

On the drive out to the Bois, the vicomtesse, lolling back in the corner of the voiture, chattered volubly of millinery, royalty, restaurants, and other things dear to her heart. Barney, on the other hand, was deeply engrossed in trying to devise some way of paying for a drive in the Bois and a thirty-franc luncheon with a single five-franc piece.

"A penny for your thoughts, Bar-r-nee," said the vicomtesse, when her stock of conversation was finally exhausted.

"'Twould take more than thot," said Barney absently.

"Oh, very well. If they are such unusually valuable thoughts——"

"To tell the truth—thot is—a thousand pardons, 'Toinette," Barney stammered. "But what ye were sayin' just now about royalty set me to wonderin' how much 'twould take to set Louis on his throne." For Barney O'Brian, firm in the belief that truth is stranger than fiction, was careful never to say anything that might sound too strange.

"There you go with your old Kings' Club again. And you will never take me there to dine. Pooh! What do I care for all your make-believe kings—I, a true vicomtesse?"

"A true queen," corrected Barney, with a bow.

"Ah! then you will really take me?" cried the vicomtesse delightedly. "Your hand upon your heart to it?"

"Gladly, 'Toinette, if me heart were only mine to lay hand upon. But, as ye well know, 'tis for you alone—why, here we are already!"

With a sigh of mingled tenderness and relief, Barney hopped to the

ground and extended a helping hand to the vicomtesse. He ostentatiously tossed his last five-franc piece to the driver, and, in a voice that the assembled waiters could not fail to hear, told him to "have something while ye're waitin'." It had always been Barney's experience that it was just as easy to be unable to pay for a well-served luncheon as for a poorly-served one.

They were shown to a table half hidden in the trees, as far as possible from the red-coated Hungarian band, who were wrestling bravely with some air that a party of Americans had hummed a synopsis of, the night before.

While Barney was busy with the menu, the vicomtesse's glance fell upon a clean-shaven man with little beadlike eyes, who was nodding and smirking at her, a few tables off.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it is Mistaire Rosenblatt!" And before Barney could venture a question she had motioned him to join them.

He left his seat, and, with mincing, flat-footed steps, came over to their table.

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise," gushed the vicomtesse, extending a tiny gloved hand to him. "Mistaire Rosenblatt—my dear friend Mistaire Bar-r-nee O'Bree-an."

Mr. Rosenblatt acknowledged the introduction with a smile that resembled an expression of inverted pain.

"Won't you sit down and join us?" suggested the vicomtesse. "Now, don't tell me that you have already had your luncheon!"

Mr. Rosenblatt signified his pleasure by going through the motions of drying his hands, and drew up a chair.

"But it is not right that I should break in on your party like this. You must let it be mine."

"Tut, tut!" protested Barney, with a firmness that caused him to wonder at himself. "I couldn't hear of it, Mr. Rosebault."

"Ro-sen-blatt," corrected the vicomtesse. "Surely you have heard of Mistaire Rosenblatt, Bar-r-nee—the son of the great Is-i-dore Rosenblatt, the famous Shee-ca-go banker?"

"Ye don't tell me!" said Barney, evidently greatly impressed.

Mr. Rosenblatt smiled, and dried his hands in pantomime some more.

While the waiter was filling their order, the vicomtesse did most of the talking. Mr. Rosenblatt, confident that his smile was more eloquent than any mere words, contented himself with an occasional monosyllable. Barney was lost in puzzled thought. Where had he heard of this banker's son before, he asked himself again and again. The name was not familiar, and yet this American, with his clean-shaven face and black little beadlike eyes—black little beadlike eyes? It dawned on him like a flash.

"I have it!" he cried aloud, bringing his fist down on the table with a force that made the cold salmon start in its plates.

"I trust it is not catching," said the vicomtesse coldly, moving her chair back as though to get out of the contagion zone.

"Weren't you in the Alcazar the other night?" Barney excitedly asked of Mr. Rosenblatt. "An' didn't a small party with vermilion whiskers——"

"Louis!" gasped the vicomtesse.

"You know him, then?" asked the astonished Rosenblatt, turning from one to the other of them.

"Know him?" Barney leaned back in his chair, and burst into laughter such as only an Irishman can.

"You!" he exclaimed between peals. "Rosenbaum, the American banker—that hellhound of a dastard spy! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Barney's face made the salmon seem pallid by comparison. "But I must explain," he said, when he had recovered somewhat.

"Yes," agreed the vicomtesse. "I think that some explanation is certainly due Mistaire Rosenblatt."

Mr. Rosenblatt thought so himself, but was too polite to say so.

"Well, ye see," Barney began, "this Louis—for certain reasons of state I'm compelled to withhold the rest of his

name—this Louis is the rightful pretender to the throne—er—to *a* throne, thot is to say. Of late, he's had reasons to fear thot the government of this counthry, of which he's rightful ruler, has suspicions of his presence here. He's bein' shadowed by spies, an' has been dhriven to resort to various villainous disguises, even goin' so far as to change the color of his beard on——"

"I have seen it in three different colors myself," commented Mr. Rosenblatt. "'Twas that that first attracted my attention to him."

"Just so," Barney continued. "An', bein' hounded in every other tint, he at last took refuge behind a mystherious shade of purple. But even thot disguise, he has reason to believe, has finally been penethrated by the ever watchful police."

"Pooh!" sneered the vicomtesse contemptuously. "He was probably stared at by some dolt of a gendarme who has not yet been told that Bluebeard is dead."

"At any rate," Barney went on, "thot night at the Alcazar he'd already had several close shaves—figuratively shpeakin', of course—an' his nerves were all on edge. Then you tapped him on the shoulder, an' he saw ye feelin' in yer inside pocket——"

"But I assure you I thought that he had lost his pocketbook," explained Mr. Rosenblatt apologetically, "and, recognizing him at a glance as 'one born,' I merely intended to offer him a slight loan."

"No doubt, sir. No doubt of it. But the minute he saw ye with yer hand in yer pocket, the one thought thot flashed through his fevered brain was thot ye had a warrant for his arrest. An' then—— Oh, my! Oh, my! To think thot I missed the sight of it! Louis tearin' madly up the aisle, wid all the waiters in France hurlin' napkins an' imprications at his heels!"

Barney shook his head in sorrow at the thought of what he had missed.

"But I did not know," protested Mr. Rosenblatt.

"To be sure ye didn't. But at thot, ye'll have to confess thot it's one on you, Rosenheim. I'm thinkin' 'twould be no more'n right to let ye pay for the luncheon, after all."

Now, of course, Barney was only joking, but while he was gone a moment to request the leader of the Hungarian band to play a certain favorite selection of his, Mr. Rosenblatt seized the opportunity to settle the check.

Barney was naturally rather indignant upon learning this, but the vicomtesse's tact soon smoothed things over, and it was at the Irishman's own invitation that Rosenblatt accompanied them on the drive back.

The banker's son was greatly impressed by the part he had unwittingly played in the intrigues of royalty.

"Mr. O'Brian," he ventured, when they had driven some distance. "I do not suppose you'd be willing to tell me what throne it is that this Louis is seeking to recover?"

"Gladly," replied Barney. "Gladly, if it were only my secret to tell. But, ye see, Mr. Rosen——"

"Blatt," the vicomtesse hurriedly interposed.

"Blatt," assented Barney. "Ye see, if any one tells ye, it ought to be Louis himself."

"But I do not know him."

"Thot's easily remedied. I'll present ye."

Mr. Rosenblatt bid fair to rub the skin off his hands, so great was his pleasure. "But where? And when?" he persisted.

"Do ye know Le Coq d'Argent? Forty-seven Rue de la Couronne? 'Tis an 'umble little place, but luxury attracts attention, an' it'll serve the purpose. Drop 'round to-morrow at noon, an' I'll petition his highness to grant ye an audience." Barney fancied that he detected a flippant remark forming on the pretty lips of the vicomtesse, and frowned it back.

They left Mr. Rosenblatt at the boulevard entrance of the Grand Hotel, where it suddenly occurred to Barney that he and the vicomtesse might as well get out, too.

"By the way, would you mind payin'

the cocher?" he asked of Rosenblatt. "I've nothing smaller than a one-hundred-franc note." This was perfectly true as far as it went.

Mr. Rosenblatt did not mind. At that moment he would gladly have bought the horse and carriage outright.

"Well, then," he said, holding out his hand to them, "to-morrow at——"

"At the hour of noon," Barney finished, with a mysterious wink. "An' now, 'Toinette, we've just time to step around the corner for one drink at Henri's, an' then——"

"And then?"

"An' then I must be off to prepare Louis for the audience he has granted for to-morrow noon."

At Henri's they picked out a table behind the portières that separate the little room in the rear from the rest of the bar.

"Henri," Barney told him, when he brought the drinks, "I will drop in an' pay for these in the mornin'."

"Very well, m'sieur."

The vicomtesse regarded Barney curiously.

"Perhaps Henri can get your one hundred-franc note changed for you at the office," she suggested.

"Certainly," said the ever obliging Henri, "if m'sieur wishes it."

"Never mind it. Don't bother," Barney said, with the air of one conferring a great favor. "'Twill be no trouble to drop in in the mornin'."

"Just as m'sieur pleases," said Henri, with a departing bow.

This time it was with admiration that the vicomtesse regarded her escort.

"Bar-r-nee," she said solemnly, "no one can truthfully say that you are lacking in that which the English call 'nerve.'"

Barney seemed surprised at the apparent irrelevancy of this remark.

"'Tis a quality thot is necessary, 'Toinette, to a man who is fightin' for a throne. I sometimes think I must inherit what little I have of it from me royal ancistor, Brian Boru," he added modestly.

IV.

"Don't walk so fast, Louis," Barney was saying. "He won't be there till noon, an' it wouldn't do for us to exhibit any unregal haste."

"But what must he think of me?" groaned Louis, slowing up in his pace. "And you are positive, my dear Bar-r-nee, that he is not some skulking detective, after all?"

"What! Are ye doubtin' 'tis really Rosenfeld, the famous American millionaire? Rest aisy, Louis. I knew him the minute I set eyes on his face. If I'd only seen him before, I might have saved ye the throuble an' humiliation of—but truly, Louis, ye're even more distinguished lookin' without it."

For Louis had actually shaved off his beard, and by the liberal use of hydrogen peroxide had restored his hair and mustaches to something of their original color.

"Now, remember, Louis," Barney cautioned him, when they were approaching Le Coq d'Argent, "the king can do no wrong. 'Tis him who should be apologizin' to you for resimblin' a hellhound spy. Be gracious, if ye like, but never for a moment forget thot 'tis you who's king."

"Trust me," said Louis, tapping his chest.

They entered, and asked François if any one had inquired for Mr. O'Brian.

"For you? But, yes. I had almost forgotten. An American gentleman. He has been waiting inside for the past two hours."

"There he is now," said Barney, catching a glimpse of Mr. Rosenblatt's head nodding violently at them from a table near the fountain. "Come, Louis!"

Louis could not repress a slight start at the sight of the man who had so many times of late caused him a very bad quarter of an hour. But he quickly pulled himself together, and followed majestically at the heels of Barney O'Brian. Mr. Rosenblatt rose to greet them.

"I have permission from his most

Christian majesty," began Barney, in tones so low as to bring an expression of disappointment to the faces of the guests at the nearest table, "to present Mr. Rosen—— Tut, tut, man! Don't kiss his hand, here. We must be prudent."

No idea of kissing Louis' hand had entered Mr. Rosenblatt's head. Otherwise Barney's warning might have been necessary.

"Rosenblatt is my name," that gentleman volunteered, when they were seated.

"I have often heard of you, M'sieur Rosenblatt," said Louis. "And also of your much-noted father."

"Yes," Barney explained. "I've been tellin' his highness how much ye regret all the annoyance ye've been causin' him durin' the past few weeks."

"It is nothing. Under similar circumstances, any other man might have done the same," said Louis, graciously dismissing the subject with a wave of his hand. "You are here for long, M'sieur Rosenblatt? Yes?"

"No, your highness, I am sorry to say. I have booked passage for the fifteenth of July."

"What an unhappiness," said Louis with feeling. "But you will visit France soon again, no doubt. And, when you do, I have every reason to hope the house of Bourbon will have come into its own again, and I, Louis XXI, will be able to welcome you at——"

"The house of Bourbon—you!"

The approach of Gaston forced Mr. Rosenblatt to contain his astonishment, and while Barney was giving the order he could only gape and stare.

"You see, Louis," Barney explained, when the waiter had gone, "knowin' thot ye'd gladly do so yerself, I didn't feel thot I had the right to dishclose to Mr. Rosenschien yer full identity. I as much as intimated thot ye had pretensions to some throne, but thot ye were the direct heir of Louis XVII, I——"

"But I did not think that Louis XVII had any heirs," said Mr. Rosenblatt. "I have always understood that he died in prison when he was a little boy during the Reign of Terror?"

"That is what they all think," Louis replied sagely. "That is what we wish them to think until the grand moment arrives. But here comes Gaston to set the table. I will explain all when we are through déjeuner."

Paced by the impatient Rosenblatt, it was not long before they finished their meal.

"And now——" suggested the American, when Gaston had removed the dishes.

"And now," whispered Louis, drawing his chair up close to the table, "I will tell you of the escape of that little dauphin of whom I, Louis XXI, am the only lineal descendant."

At this point, Barney whipped out a battered old silver watch that had not run for several years, and glanced at it with deep agitation.

"Saints alive!" he exclaimed. "I had no idea of the time of it. 'Tis losin' me mind entirely, I am! If you and Mr. Rosenheimer will wait here, Louis, I'll be back in half an hour."

Barney left the table, and hurried out of the room. At the door he paused to speak to François.

"The gentleman with Louis will pay the check."

Barney started to go out, but stopped as though he had forgotten something.

"'Tis crazy they are, these Americans," he casually observed.

François nodded.

"They don't seem to know their own stomachs," Barney continued. "Now, you an' I, François, if we had a good dinner at a low price, 'tis lucky we'd think we were."

"Most assuredly, m'sieur."

"But with these Americans 'tis different. If the price is low, they argue, the dinner must have been bad."

François favored Barney with a series of grateful little bows. "M'sieur knows that it is my desire always to please my patrons."

Barney strolled aimlessly up the Rue de la Couronne. He was really fond of Louis, and would have gone a good bit out of his way to do him a favor.

But the historical romance had never appealed to him as it does to some, and even Louis' thrilling portrayal of the escape of the dauphin and the subsequent adventures of the Bourbons began to pall on him after the tenth repetition.

As near as Barney could calculate, he turned into the boulevard just as Louis was relating his ancestor's hairbreadth escape from the Bastille. And, unless the story had been changed of late in the light of new historical discoveries, it was about the time of the dauphin's flight to Southern France that he, Barney O'Brian, seated himself outside of a café and ordered a glass of beer. He sipped his drink slowly, so as to give the Bourbon family ample time to pass through the four generations that were to culminate in Louis XXI, and then started leisurely back toward Le Coq d'Argent.

Upon reëntering the restaurant, Barney found Louis and Mr. Rosenblatt so deeply absorbed in conversation that they barely paused to acknowledge his return.

"But when do you plan this general uprising?" Mr. Rosenblatt was asking.

"When?" repeated Louis, his eyes shining with excitement. "When? Who can tell? The country is ripe for it, now. While this low-born republic lies sleeping in Paris, confident only because of its gross ignorance, discontent is ever spreading on and on, o'er field and factory, throughout the land. Hark! The mutterings are becoming louder. The toilers lay aside their work to listen. For what? The leader's voice! The call to arms!"

"Louis! Louis!" Barney cautioned him. "Careful with the butter knife! The time ain't ripe yet."

"Then why do you wait?" inquired Rosenblatt, ignoring Barney's interruption.

"Money," said Louis sadly.

For several moments, only the sound of Rosenblatt's eating broke the silence. Then:

"How much would it take?"

Louis took a pencil from his pocket and began to figure on a menu card.

"With one hundred thousand francs I could fit out an entire regiment," he finally announced. "Yes, a hundred thousand francs would do it nicely."

"But surely," Rosenblatt objected, "you do not expect to conquer all of France with a single regiment?"

"You do not understand. This one regiment is to be but the nucleus. Give me one regiment of trained soldiers on the Swiss border, and the instant I cross the frontier the people will trample over each other in their eagerness to flock to my standards. All along the line of march thousands upon thousands will rush to join the cause. When we reach Paris, what have we? A handful of usurping republican officials. To oppose what? King Louis XXI and La Belle France. Will they resist, do you think? If they do——"

In an attempt to illustrate what would happen to them if they did, the excited Louis swept a couple of glasses off the table with his hand. So wrought up was he over the vivid picture he had been drawing, that the crash of glass upon the floor could not have startled him more had it been an actual clash of arms.

"Here is Gaston coming to sweep up the pieces," he said, recovering from the shock somewhat. "Another time I will tell you all."

Soon after that, the party broke up. On the way back to his hotel, Mr. Rosenblatt's mind was filled with daydreams of what he had heard that afternoon. It seemed almost too strange to be true.

"Only a hundred thousand francs to put Louis on the throne of France," he was thinking. "Less than a tenth of my income. And Louis would be grateful. My friend, King Louis! The name Rosenblatt would be as famous then as the name of Rothschild is today."

His mind's eye began to scan imaginary newspaper items: "It is said that the Rosenblatts are behind this." Or, "It is rumored that the Rosenblatts oppose that." And 'twould all be his for a paltry hundred thousand francs!

All that night noted financiers haunted him in his dreams. They were forever asking favors or imploring mercy; while he, the Baron de Rosenblatt, rubbed his hands and smiled, and replied with ever the same question: "Why should I? What's in it for me if I do?"

V.

After their first meeting, Louis and Rosenblatt were almost inseparable. A line signed "Louis, Rex," was enough to bring the American as fast as horses or motors could draw him to any place at any hour of the day. Every afternoon, on the boulevards, in the cafés, or even out at the races, they could be seen together scheming for the future welfare of Louis, Rosenblatt, and France.

In the evening, they often sought relaxation from affairs of state in a little dinner at one of the vaudeville performances on the Champs Elysées. At first, Barney O'Brian, as well as the Vicomtesse d'Henriot, was invited to fill out at these little parties, but gradually the invitations to the Irishman became less frequent, and finally ceased altogether.

"Of course, if he is a particular friend of your majesty's," Mr. Rosenblatt had said, "let us have him by all means. But personally I do not put very much faith in him. There is too much frivolity in his make-up."

"You are right, *mon cher* David," agreed Louis. "Besides, I have noticed of late that this O'Bree-an's attentions are very annoying to our friend, the vicomtesse."

Barney had noticed this same thing, and that was what wounded him most. That Louis was barely civil to him he did not so much mind. True, it was through him that Louis had met this Rosenblatt, for whom he had now thrown him over; but Barney came of a race that learned long ago not to look for gratitude from those for whom it had done favors. The vicomtesse, though, was different.

Only a short time ago, she had always spoken jestingly of Louis' disguises, and had taunted Barney with his friendship for such a droll little creature. And when Barney used to launch into heated defenses of his friend and maintain stoutly that it was the color of a man's heart and not of his whiskers that counted most, the vicomtesse would clap her little hands in delight, and say: "Bar-r-nee! Bar-r-nee! What it is to have you for a friend!"

But now, when she met him, which was by no means as often as before, it was always, "Louis says this," "Louis does that," or "Louis thinks the other thing." It hurt Barney.

One Friday noon, shortly after his elimination from the dinner parties, Barney was seated at the American bar of the Grand Hotel, trying to drown his sorrow in one of those cocktails with which he had formerly sought to stimulate his happiness.

The Vicomtesse d'Henriot entered hurriedly.

"Oh, Henri," she said, tapping a letter impatiently against the bar, "would you mind putting a stamp on this and dropping it in the box for me? It simply must get there to-night, and I haven't a sou to my name." She caught sight of Barney. "Hello, Bar-r-nee," she carelessly greeted him.

Barney took a little tissue-paper package from his pocket and very deliberately unwrapped it. It contained a copper sou that the vicomtesse had once given him to make good her offer of a penny for his thoughts. He laid it on the bar.

"This'll pay for the stamp, Henri," he said. "Madame might forget it."

The vicomtesse regarded him with astonishment. "What is the matter with you, Bar-r-nee? You have not been yourself lately."

"Maybe ye're right, 'Toinette. Perhaps thot's why me friends seem to have such difficulty in recognizin' me."

"Why, Bar-r-nee! Come over to this table, and tell me what is the matter with you. You may also order me a limon squash, if you like."

For several minutes after Henri had brought the drinks, Barney sulkily re-

sisted all efforts on the part of the vicomtesse to draw him out. Then he looked up at her curiously.

"'Toinette," he said gravely, "which would you rather be—Mrs. Barney O'Brian, or the Queen uv France?"

The light of understanding slowly dispelled the vicomtesse's mystification.

"So that is what has been worrying my Bar-r-nee man!" she said, with a little laugh.

She reached across the table, and rested her hand lightly on Barney's.

"Bar-r-nee," she said, becoming serious, "you know as well as I do that we cannot always have things just as we would wish them. If I could have my way! But, no. I am of a noble family of the *ancien régime.* If the king commands, I must obey."

"Ye married into that noble family," argued Barney, "an' I should think 'twould be just as aisy to marry out of it again."

The vicomtesse withdrew her hand from Barney's.

"You are very rude to-day," she said icily. She got up from the table, and, with an extraordinary amount of dignity, swept out of the place.

Barney walked slowly over to the bar. The copper sou was still lying where he had placed it. He idly spun it a few times, and then, with an exaggerated air of indifference, replaced it in his pocketbook and wandered out.

Upon reaching his lodgings, he found a letter from England. At a glance, he recognized the handwriting as that of his Cousin Delacy, to whose pecuniary advantage Grandfather O'Brian had, in a fit of goutish pique, disinherited Barney. The letter contained his monthly allowance, together with the closely written pages of good advice that the well off always feel privileged to inflict upon their poor relations.

He carefully placed the draft in his pocket, and then settled down for a bad quarter of an hour with the good advice. For Barney hated charity, and the reading of his cousin's letters gave him more the feeling of having earned his money.

This letter broke away from the usual copy-book topliners.

Young Chetwynd-Jones, who has just returned from Paris, tells me that you are spending your money foolishly.

"Young Chetwynd-Jones ought to know," muttered Barney. "He still owes me those three louis he borrowed."

I also gathered from what he said that you are madly infatuated with a Vicomtesse Darrio, or some such name. Now, of course, Bernard, I know nothing about this Darrio woman; but, in view of certain things I have heard, I feel called upon to remind you that the allowance, which I send you this month as usual, will be continued only so long as you do nothing to bring discredit upon the family name.

With a feeling that he had earned that month's remittance without reading farther, Barney crumpled the letter up in a little ball and reached for his hat and cane. Money that was tainted with such sentiments his pride forbade him to retain. He would seek congenial company and spend it at once.

Stopping only to get his draft cashed, he made for the temporary palace of Pierre le Terrible, over on the other side of the Seine. He discovered that wronged sovereign standing before a mirror, in the act of waxing his blond little mustaches, which had become a trifle timid looking from the heat, back into their customary lines of aggression.

"Bar-r-nee!" Pierre cried, in delighted surprise. "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure. You must pardon my negligée, but be seated. I will be with you in a moment."

"I just dropped in to see if you had anything on hand for the rest of the day," Barney said.

Pierre assumed a thoughtful pose. Not that he had any engagement; it was rather that he had no money. And, while he knew that that would make no difference to Barney, it made all the difference in the world to him. Pierre was either too much of a king or too little of a king not to be sensitive about such things. Barney seemed to divine his friend's feelings.

"I wanted some one to go on a little secret mission with me," he said. "Of course, if ye can't come, I could get some one else, I suppose, but I wanted a man with plenty of tact an' keen powers of observation."

"I am free," announced Pierre. "I had intended—— But, no. I am at your service. What is the nature of this secret mission of which you speak, my dear Bar-r-nee?"

Barney glanced inquiringly at the door. Pierre tiptoed over and bolted it. Thus assured, Barney drew up his chair and proceeded to explain:

"Ye may have noticed of late, Peter, thot our friend Louis seems to have feelin's thot the iron's hot, an' thot now's the time to strike for his rights to the throne. Not thot he's said so in so many words, Peter. But he's been throwin' out veiled hints thot poor, bleedin' France was never intinded for a republic; thot she was made for a monarchy, in the first place, an' thot all she needs to restore her to her former greatness is some strong hand to seize the reins of the government. To men of our penethration, Peter, the inference is plain. He's the strong-arm man thot poor, bleedin' France is lookin' for.

"But has Louis read the nation's pulse correctly, Peter? Far be it from us to want to see a member of the Kings' Club cast all in one throw an' lose everything. An' thot's why I've come to you. 'Twill be our mission to learn how the heart of Paris beats. In the cafés, on the boulevards, at the theatres—we will mingle with the people everywheres. If we find them ready for the grand coup—well an' good. If not, then we owe it to Louis to let him know."

"For Louis' sake!" said Pierre dramatically. "But the expense of such an investigation, Bar-r-nee? I am sorry, but——"

"The expenses have been provided for—by friends in England."

Pierre's eyes opened wide with surprise. He had had no idea that the movement for Louis had spread so widely. But rather than betray any ignorance on the subject, he merely said: "Let us start, then. I'm ready."

"Remimber, Peter," Barney cautioned him, as they were going down the stairs, "this is dangerous business. Not even a whisper. We may be watched at every turn. While we are at work we had better forgit the object uv our mission entirely, an' act as though we were just out for the good time of it."

They carried out Barney's programme to the letter. No one seeing them would have dreamed that they were anything but a big, simple-hearted Irishman and a gay little Frenchman out together for the best kind of a good time. So well did they play their parts, in fact, that they almost succeeded in deceiving themselves; and, late that evening, when they drifted into Maxim's, it was just as much for a bite of supper as for the purpose of sounding the feelings of the American traveling public on a possible change in the government of France.

It was not until they were marching back to Pierre's lodgings, humming little snatches of song, that more serious thoughts began to fight for a place in Barney's mind. He stopped short in the middle of a verse, and, seizing Pierre by the shoulders, whirled him around so that they stood facing each other.

"Peter," said Barney very solemnly, "never place any faith in a true woman. If ye must trust any woman, trust a false one. Then ye know what to expect."

Pierre nodded silent approval at this characteristic bit of Irish philosophy, and they resumed their march.

VI.

While Barney and Pierre were busy feeling the pulse of Paris, the monarch in whose interests they were secretly working was watching the races from the pavilion of the Longchamps hippodrome. At his side sat the royal favorite of the hour, David Rosenblatt.

It was just before the last race, and the two were studying their entry lists.

"Ah, here is an English name—Darling," said Rosenblatt. "I must place a little bet on him."

"You had better not," Louis advised him. "The man behind us, who seems to have much knowledge of the horses, says that the race is between Le Diable and Fleur de Lys. The others have no more show than—— How is it you say it? Ah, yes—no more show than one ball of snow in Hades."

"Nevertheless, I must place a little something on this Darling just for the sake of the name." And, in spite of his friend's remonstrance, Rosenblatt left to place his bet.

Before his return the starter had given the signal, and the race was on. The horses got off together. At the first turn, two of them began to draw away a little from the others; and by the joyous shouts of "Fleur de Lys" and "Le Diable" that went up from all parts of the field it was easy to tell that those two were the favorites. Sentiment seemed about equally divided between them.

Then Le Diable gradually forged to the front until he had half a length's lead, but there Fleur de Lys hung on like a leech. They were moving as one animal. When they rounded into the stretch it was either's race, with the bunch four lengths behind. The spectators surged to their feet in a great human wave.

"Le Diable! Le Diable!" half of them were shouting.

"Fleur de Lys! Fleur de Lys!" shouted back the other half.

"Fleur de Lys! Le Diable! Fleur Diable! Diable Lys!"—it was deafening.

And then, right in the middle of it all, some one clutched wildly at his neighbor's sleeve, and pointed out toward the track. "Look, look!" he cried. "Who is it?"

Others saw it and grasped their neighbors' arms. The cheering died out. "Who is it? Which is it?" they were all asking each other.

Which was that gaunt black horse that had clattered out from the bunch and was tearing madly down the stretch after the leaders? He would catch them—yes—no—yes—he was leading!

"Come on, Le Diable!" came in tones of anguish. And then, up from the betting ring, clear and exultant, rose a single voice: "Darling! Darling! Darling!"

The gaunt black horse was thundering under the wire, the winner by a black, ugly head.

"Dar-r-lang!" snarled one man, shaking his fist threateningly at the steaming winner.

"Dar-r-lang! Dar-r-lang!" came angrily from another.

In an instant the place was in an uproar. Men hurled their hats on the floor and stamped upon them savagely. Dar-r-lang! They waved their arms frantically. Dar-r-lang! They shook their fists and tore at their hair. And above all could be heard the frenzied cry, "Dar-r-lang! Dar-r-lang! Dar-r-lang!"

While the confusion was at its height, a clean-shaven man, smiling broadly, rushed up to the front of the stand and looked searchingly through the crowd. When finally he caught Louis' eye, he waved a fist full of banknotes, and cried jubilantly, "Darling!"

At that the pandemonium redoubled. *"Conspuez* Dar-r-lang! *Vive l'armée! A bas les juifs!"*

The smile vanished from Rosenblatt's face. He turned white with terror.

"Louis, Louis!" he called entreatingly.

Louis, looking very small and very blond, fought his way valiantly out of the stand through a bombardment of hats, gloves, and crumpled programmes.

"Hurry, Louis, hurry!" his friend urged, dragging him by the hand. "The chauffeur is waiting with the automobile which I hired."

"At last!" said Rosenblatt, with a heartfelt sigh of relief, when they were speeding through the Bois a few minutes later.

"Another attempt upon my life," growled Louis. "Do they think I am

a little blockhead that I do not see through their clumsy plots?"

"You think it was a conspiracy, then? But, Louis"—Mr. Rosenblatt had resumed his normal smile—"there is one consolation. I have won five thousand francs."

"Five thousand francs!" gasped Louis, with mingled envy and admiration. "But I thought that you were going to make only a little bet?"

"So I was. But it was so cheap that I really couldn't resist it. He was what you call a 'long shot.' Nobody else wanted him. Such a bargain, Louis; such a bargain!" Mr. Rosenblatt rubbed his hands with relish at the thought of it. "And do you know what I am going to do with all of this money that I have just won?"

"I know what I should do with it if I had won it," sighed Louis.

"Well, my friend, I am going to do with it just what I think you would do with it."

"You surely do not mean——"

"S-s-sh!" cautioned Rosenblatt, indicating the chauffeur with a jerk of his thumb. "Wait until after dinner."

Louis scarcely dared give credence to his own senses. Could his good friend David possibly intend to subscribe the whole of his winnings, five thousand francs, to the royal cause? The very idea of it frightened him. With such an amount, how would he begin?

He saw himself, sword in hand, galloping into Paris on a coal-black charger named Dar-r-lang. Strong men fell trembling to their knees and begged for mercy. When he bade them arise, a mighty cheer went up, and they proclaimed him king. *"Vive le roi!"* Beautiful women strewed his path with flowers and blew kisses at him. The Vicomtesse d'Henriot stood waiting for him at the top of the palace steps. He was just about to advance to take her hand when a great, grinning Irishman dragged her inside and locked the doors. What foolishness! Louis blotted out the unpleasant picture with a shake of his head. They had just passed the Arc de Triomphe.

Rosenblatt, too, had a vision. To him the automobile had become a busy countingroom. A handsome, distinguished-looking man, who, impossible as it may seem, exactly resembled himself, was the central figure. People gazed at him and told each other in awestruck whispers that the distinguished-looking man was Rosenblatt—the Baron de Rosenblatt, the famous financier. But, while he was rubbing his hands and smiling, he felt a sharp tap on the shoulder, and a voice, with a rich Irish brogue, growled: "Clear out uv this, now. The Baron de Rothschild will be here any minute. Clear out!"

Rosenblatt threw off the horrid vision with a shudder. They had just passed the Arc de Triomphe.

They dined at Marguery's.

"Louis," said Rosenblatt, when the demi-tasses were brought on, "you have told me that with one hundred thousand francs you could gain the crown of France."

"It is true," said Louis, trembling with emotion.

Rosenblatt tapped the tips of his fingers together as though considering. It seemed ages to Louis before he spoke.

"Louis, I will give you five thousand francs now——"

"David! You cannot mean it!"

"And when I reach my own country I will direct my bankers to send you ninety-five thousand more."

Only the table prevented Louis from embracing his benefactor.

"But upon one condition," Rosenblatt added.

"You shall be my Minister of Finance," the delighted Louis assured him.

"And baron, Louis."

"And baron, David."

VII.

The afternoon after his visit to the races, Louis XXI, immaculate in a new suit of royal raiment, waited in the conciergerie of a little hotel on the Rue la Boetie. He was nervous. The vicomtesse had sent word that she

would be down in just a minute. She had already been more than fifteen minutes. Louis picked a thread from his trousers. They were beautiful, roomy, French trousers, that hung at a respectful distance from his royal legs. He tugged at the little skirts of his frock coat to make them stand out better. He gazed in the mirror at his soft, flowing cravat. It was certainly *très gentil*. His hat was a trifle worn, perhaps, but what would you? It was one of those splendid, straight-crowned, flat-brimmed silk hats. It would be absurd to buy a new one for the three or four remaining weeks. At the end of that time he would no longer need a hat. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown, did they say? Pooh! Did they think he was going to sleep in it? Then they were little idiots.

His thoughts were interrupted by a swishing of skirts—the gentle, breeze-like swishing that distinguishes the skirts of a Frenchwoman from the rasping, cyclone-like petticoats of her British sister.

"Good day, Louis," said the vicomtesse. "I fear I have kept you waiting."

Louis bowed low over the hand that she extended.

"Ah, madame, I have been waiting only a few minutes. It is that the minutes become ages when one is waiting for Madame la Vicomtesse. But even by waiting ages one could not possibly deserve the final reward of seeing her."

"Flatterer! But where are we going? You did not mention in your note. A walk in the Bois? Good."

How much she looked like a queen, thought Louis, as he held the door for her. He made a mental note of the fact. Later he would tell her that she looked like a queen. It would make a good introduction for what he intended to say to her that afternoon.

But, as they walked through the Rue la Boetie, to the Champs Elysées, past the Arc de Triomphe, into the Bois de Boulogne, he found it more and more difficult to introduce even his introduction. The conversation took such curious turns. Now, just why the vicomtesse directed the talk away from the things that were uppermost in Louis' mind she could not tell herself. She knew when Louis invited her to come out that he had intended to ask her to become his wife. It was for that reason she had accepted his invitation. For days past she had been working him up to it. But now that he was actually on the verge of proposing—oh, well, she could not understand it herself. If only he were not quite so little and insignificant. How short he was, especially when compared with—well, with taller men. What was this he was saying now?

"'Toinette, if ever I should sit upon the throne of France——"

"And you will, Louis. Some day you will. In the meantime, let us sit upon this shaded bench. I am so tired."

"It is your loyalty to the cause that makes you speak so confidently of our chances," said Louis when they were seated. "It is to such loyalty as yours that France owes its approaching salvation. We shall not forget it."

"If we only had the money," sighed the vicomtesse, wrinkling her pretty forehead, as though trying to evolve some solution to the problem.

"S-s-sh!" whispered Louis impressively. "We—already—have—the—money." He drew back to watch the effect of this startling revelation.

The vicomtesse clasped her hands delightedly, and gave a little gasp of surprise.

"You have the money? Mr. Rosenblatt——"

Louis nodded with the air of a man who, being discovered in some noble work, reluctantly admits it.

"He has given you enough to raise your whole army?"

"He has already advanced five thousand francs with which to draft the first regiment. The rest he will forward the minute he reaches his own country."

The vicomtesse was lost in thought. Louis attributed her silence to admira-

tion. Here was his chance, while she was thus impressed with his greatness.

"'Toinette," he ventured, with a sad effort at offhandedness, "you look like a queen."

"Do you, too, think so?" she murmured absently.

"I, *too!* Do I, *too,* think so! And who else, pray, dares——"

Anger choked off the rest of his sentence. The vicomtesse was critically examining the tips of her patent leather pumps.

"Ah," she said, without looking up, "so you were only flattering me, after all. You think it impossible that others beside yourself should think me a queen."

"'Toinette!"

"For, if even the common people can see nothing queenly in me, how could one of royal blood—the king himself——"

"'Toinette, listen. I was jealous. Forgive me. You are already queen of women. I now ask you to be Queen of France. It is I, the king, who asks you."

"I? Queen of France? Yes—since the king requests it."

"'Toinette! My love, my adored one!" Louis seized her hand in both of his.

She snatched it angrily from him.

"How dare you!" she demanded indignantly.

"But have you not promised to be my wife?" protested the bewildered Louis.

"I have promised to marry the King of France."

"But I will soon be that King of France."

"Then it will not be long before you may hold my hand. Come. It is growing late. We must be starting home."

During the walk back, Louis was alternately despondent and joyous. One minute he would be in the throes of despair because the vicomtesse would not be his until he was king. A minute later his little heart would swell with joy at the thought that the vicomtesse loved the King of France, and that he would be that king.

The vicomtesse, so far as it is possible to analyze a woman's state of mind, was unhappy at not feeling happier. However, she resolved to make the best of things.

"Do you mean to tell me, Louis, that with five thousand francs one can purchase only one paltry little regiment of soldiers?"

"That amount is merely to draft them," said Louis, with an indulgent smile. "Later on it will require much more money than that, even."

"Gracious! I had no idea that they were so expensive. Why, with five thousand francs I could buy a dozen new frocks. I suppose I will need some new things to be queen in," she added thoughtfully. "I ought to have something to wear in the Bois—a gray chiffon with beautiful old yellow lace would be nice. I could wear that with pearls. And one of those great big picture hats, with a heavenly white feather drooping over the side. I'll only have to wear my crown on formal occasions, of course. And, oh, Louis, I won't have to wear ermine at state affairs, will I?"

Louis thought not.

"Because I simply despise ermine; and a purple velvet, cut princess, would be ever so much more becoming. I could wear amethysts with the purple velvet. Amethysts aren't really precious stones, of course, but I don't mind that. Diamonds are so horribly *nouvelle royale.* But you're not taking a bit of interest, Louis."

"Yes, yes, but all that will come later," said Louis, beginning to realize the burdens of royalty.

As they were nearing the Rue la Boetie, a voiture, containing a vivacious little Frenchman and a big, rawboned Irishman, whirled past them. The Frenchman was looking the other way and did not see them, but the Irishman bowed low and swept off his hat with exaggerated deference. The vicomtesse glanced about her, as though trying to discover to whom the big man was bowing. Seeing no one,

she gave a little shrug that plainly said: "What does it matter?"

She was very angry with Barney O'Brian. Why was she angry? A woman is never reasonable; perhaps it was because he was not King of France.

VIII.

On the morning of the fourteenth of July, Barney O'Brian and Pierre le Terrible were taking déjeuner together at Le Coq d'Argent. A portion of the monthly insult from Barney's cousin still remained unspent, and the Irishman was trying to devise some way of getting it off his mind and out of his pocket.

"Peter," said Barney, "to-day is the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille. It's the most wonderful holiday in all the world."

Pierre nodded assent, and took advantage of the opportunity to capture the odd egg.

"There's not another city in the world where they could suspend ordinances an' say to the people: 'Here's yer city, take an' do what ye like with it. Ye'll find music in all the squares to dance an' sing with. Enjoy yerselves as much as ye want. What would ever happen in London if they ever did anything like thot? They'd raid the gin-mills, smash the doors, an' heave pavin' blocks through every pane of glass in the town. There'd be a religious conthroversy on every corner. There'd be free speech so free as to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of a degenerate deaf mute. Why, Peter, every time there's a victory in India, or a loss in South Africa, or a birth in the royal family, they pull the whole city up by the roots. 'Tis the only way they have of expressin' their joys an' sorrows.

"But in Paris what have ye? Everybody has a good time, an' dances an' sings to his heart's content. Yet there's no disorder, no drunkenness, an' no indecent language in even the lowest slums of the town.

"Why, Peter," continued Barney, warming up to his subject, "I met an American college professor once thot had brought his son over here just to have him see the city on the fourteenth of July. He wanted to show the boy thot with all the gayety an' merry-makin' thot was goin' on they wouldn't hear one profance word uttered in any part of Paris."

"And did they?" asked Pierre, becoming mildly interested.

"They never knew," sighed Barney. "The professor had forgotten thot neither of them could understand French."

Pierre regarded his friend doubtfully. Was this one of those droll Irish jokes? From the seriousness of Barney's face he decided that it would be safer not to laugh.

"But what I started out to say in the first place was this," resumed Barney. "The other day, if ye remember rightly, we made a little secret investigation in the intherests of a certain friend of ours who has exalted expectations. Well an' good, as far as he went. But Paris, on three hundred and sixty-three days of the year, Peter, is comparatively sane. 'Tis only on two days of each year, New Year's an' July fourteenth, thot it casts off all affectation an' becomes its own natural self.

"Now, I hate to ask ye to sacrifice so much of yer valuable time, Peter, but, since we've undertaken the mission at all, we should do it right. The other day when we felt the pulse of the nation, it was abnormally excited in its efforts to keep calm. To-day we will find thot same pulse normal in the calm of its natural excitement. Will ye make the sacrifice, Peter?"

"For Louis' sake—gladly," assented Pierre.

"Then come."

They turned into the boulevard and hailed a fiacre.

"We'll arouse less suspicion by drivin'," Barney explained. "Kings who are off duty by force of circumstances usually walk."

Their conversation during the first part of the drive was of a strictly pri-

vate nature, and has absolutely no bearing upon this story. The polite reader, therefore, will gladly consent to awaiting their arrival in that part of the Bois where the Parisian youth indulges his passion for outdoor sport. By so doing, he will miss nothing of the narrative.

Now, among Anglo-Saxons there is a general impression that the French are not much given to athletics. This impression can be easily dispelled by a visit, any pleasant afternoon, to that part of the Bois given over to "le sport."

"Le sport" is unlike any Anglo-Saxon game such as football, cricket, baseball, or tennis. It has the advantage over any of these. In the first place, the contestants are not hampered by any rules, and no previous knowledge of the game is required. In fact, any preconceived ideas of "le sport" would probably lead to disappointment and confusion, as the game is seldom played twice in the same way. Other points in its favor are that there are no sides, and that no one wins or loses, thereby eliminating the petty jealousies incident to the Anglo-Saxon games.

The proper costume for "le sport" is an "Anglish swetter." "Anglish swetters" are thinly woven jerseys with high necks, resembling the wristlets affected by American motormen in winter time. They may be had at the Bon Marché in perfectly ravishing colors. If one wishes, he may also provide himself with a "rugbee," or large, round, rubber ball such as is used in Association football.

When the players are assembled upon the field—no particular number is required—each takes whatever position he desires. Then some fortunate possessor of a "rugbee" kicks it high into the air. At this, the other contestants jump madly up and down, shouting "Bravo!"

When the ball reaches the ground and starts bouncing, they gesticulate wildly, and send up frenzied shouts of "Futball!" "Limonade!" "Le sport!" "Roastbiff!" "Offside!" "Goddam!" and other phrases that the French commonly associate with British sporting life.

When the ball has at last come to rest, and the excitement partially abated, some one else takes a turn at kicking, and the same performance is gone through over again. This is repeated until, by mutual consent, the game comes to a close. If desired, batting a tennis ball up in the air with a racquet may be substituted for kicking the "rugbee." This gives opportunity for the use of additional English sporting terms, such as, "Forty-luff!" "Outside!" "Biffstek!" "Sleeping car!" and "Fifteen all!"

On the afternoon of the fourteenth of July, when Barney and Pierre reached that part of the Bois, "le sport" was at its height.

Pierre could hardly contain his excitement. "Ah!" he exclaimed, seizing Barney by the arm, and directing his attention to the game. "The Anglish rugbee! Is it not wonderful? How it must make you long for your home and those thrilling native sports!"

"It does," sighed Barney sadly.

It has been explained that "le sport" is seldom played twice in the same manner, and right here something happened that was unprecedented in the annals of the game.

The "rugbee," instead of going perpendicularly up in the air, left the kicker's toe at an unexpected angle, and flew straight toward the fiacre of Barney and Pierre. The Irishman sprang up on the seat just in time to make a most wonderful catch of the ball.

"Allez, allez!" he roared at the driver. "Go for yer life!"

The *cocher,* without pausing to ask the reason why, gave the horse a cut that made him plunge forward as if he had been shot out of a gun.

The cheer with which the French youths had greeted Barney's thrilling catch gave way to a howl of rage when they saw the voiture galloping off with their precious "rugbee." They tore madly after it, shaking their fists, and loudly denouncing Barney for a "Pig!" "Robber!" "Dog!"

The Irishman smiled back at them, and acknowledged their angry gestures with genial wavings of the hand.

But the pursuit did not last long. One youth, whose efforts with a racquet and tennis ball had met with little response while the football had been in use, saw his chance, at last.

With a ringing "Thirty-deuce! Play!" he batted the ball high in the air. The effect was magical. Barney's pursuers, unable to resist the call to arms, rushed back, and were dancing around the tennis ball before it had reached its second bounce. From the enthusiastic cries of "Forty-deuce!" and "Luff thirty-all!" one would never have thought that there had been any football in the game.

In the meantime, Barney was explaining to a mounted guard who had galloped alongside that nothing was the matter.

"The nag took a bit of fright at 'le sport,' but he's all right, now," Barney assured him.

The officer glanced rather dubiously at the football which Barney still held, but, as the players had resumed their game, and as there was no one to verify his suspicions, he was forced to accept the explanation.

It was some minutes before Pierre's heart followed the good example of the horse in settling down to a normal jog.

"Whatever made you do such a thing, Bar-r-nee?"

"Faith, I can't tell ye meself, Peter," laughed Barney. "It must have been yer talk about the thrillin' games of me native land thot fired me sportin' blood."

"But why did you run away with the ball?" demanded Pierre, angry at having been so badly frightened. "You have taken something which does not belong to you."

The smile faded from the Irishman's face, and he became serious.

"'Tis a very old English custom, Peter. 'Tis part of le sport Anglaise. An' Ireland's always been the ball."

"But of what use is it?"

"The football? Only the satisfaction of havin' it. An' when there's nothin' better to do, maybe I'll kick it around a bit, just for the fun of it."

"No, no. I did not mean that, Bar-r-nee. But of what use is Ireland to England? For why does England keep the ball?"

"The answer's the same."

Pierre pondered over this. It was the first time he had ever heard the Irishman speak seriously of his country.

"Bar-r-nee," he asked after a pause, "how is it that you are the only pretender to the throne of Ireland? I have always understood that there were many other Irish kings besides this great ancestor of yours, this Boru O'Brian. Did not they leave any descendants?"

"Plenty of them," acknowledged Barney. "Every true Irishman thot ain't Scotch is descended from kings. But none of the rest uv them has time to pretend. They're too busy governin' other nations to be bothered with their own. Why, Peter, 'tis an accepted fact thot the most influential people in every counthry under the sun speak their native tongues with a bit of a brogue. But, aside from all thot, my claims are the best, for old Brian was the greatest king of 'em all."

"So I have always understood," Pierre politely agreed. "But there is another great Irishman, of whom I have heard spoken. I once met an Englishman who told me that Ol-ee-vere Crom-well was the greatest man that ever lived. I repeated this to an acquaintance of mine named Mur-r-phee, and M'sieur Mur-r-phee replied: 'O'Hell!' with an emphasis that gave me to understand that he considered this M'sieur O'Hell a much greater man than Ol-ee-vere Crom-well, even. Tell me, Bar-r-nee, do you agree with M'sieur Mur-r-phee?"

From the redness of Barney's face, and the manner in which he bit his lip, Pierre feared, at first, that he had said something to offend his friend. The tone of Barney's voice, however, quickly reassured him.

"It's really hard to compare the two,

Peter. There's no denyin' thot this O'Hell is the very divil of a lad for startin' a scrap, but I don't think thot he ranks very high as a statesman. Still, ye often hear his name mentioned with great enthusiasm even in England."

IX.

When Barney and Pierre reached the American bar of the Grand Hotel, that evening, the holiday gayeties were in full swing in and around the Place de l'Opéra. The room was crowded with men and women, all laughing and chattering and jesting. Barney placed the football on the bar, and asked Henri if he would mind taking care of it for him.

"Ah," said Henri, with some surprise, "I did not know that m'sieur went in for 'le sport.'"

"I sort of took it up on the spur of the moment," Barney informed him.

The Irishman glanced about the room. A man with an American flag in his buttonhole was addressing those who would listen to him at the other end of the bar. He was a bottle-shouldered stalk of a man, whose features looked as though they had promised to meet each other at a point in the centre of his face and were on their way.

"Why, what show would these red-legged French pigmies have against a regiment of trained United States soldiers?" he was oratorically demanding. "The American soldier is the ideal fighting man of the world. Five feet eleven inches in height, lithe, and athletic of build——"

"Ye must be about five foot eleven yerself," suggested Barney, eying him critically.

"Exactly, sir. I see you're American, too."

"No, I'm an Irishman."

"All the same thing, sir. I'm pleased to meet you. Have a drink?"

"With pleasure. What'll ye have, Peter?" asked Barney, turning to Pierre. "Mr.—er——"

"Hornblower, sir. Captain Hornblower. Let me give you a card, sir."

He handed Barney a beautiful celluloid card with rounded corners. It bore this inscription:

CAPTAIN J. LAUDER HORNBLOWER,
BOSTON, MASS.,
U. S. A.
Ancient and Honorable Lancers.
A. O. Buffaloes, Medford Council.
Past Master, O.D.F., Persian Shrine, 113.

"Well, well," said Barney. "The Ancient and Honorable Lancers. I knew ye for a military man the second I laid eyes on ye."

They drank a health to the Ancient and Honorable Lancers, and Barney could not help feeling, from the decrepit specimen before him, that they certainly needed it.

"Europeans don't know how to celebrate holidays," stated Captain Hornblower with the air of one who knows. "Why, when we came over to visit the Venerable Volunteers of London—that's the parent organization—we all brought firecrackers to help celebrate the glorious Fourth of July, and they actually wouldn't allow us to fire 'em." By way of proof, he drew out a handful of firecrackers, and passed them over for Barney's inspection.

"An' so these are American firecrackers? I've often heard of them. Would ye mind me takin' a couple just for a souvenir?"

"Help yourself, sir. I've plenty more in my trunk. They had the audacity to tell us that if we fired 'em in London we'd be arrested. Think of that, sir! Free-born American citizens threatened with arrest on English soil! I guess they're still sore over that lickin' we gave them in 1776."

"When?" gasped Barney, astounded.

"In 1776, sir. And we did it again in 1812."

"Well, who'd ever think it to look at ye? Ye certainly don't look one-half yer age," Barney answered him earnestly. "I'll wager there ain't an-

other ancient lancer in the whole company of ye thot's one-tenth so well preserved. I'm doubly glad to have met ye, an' I hope we'll meet again."

Barney and Pierre left Captain Hornblower spluttering indignation, and drifted up toward the door. On the end of the bar, the Irishman spied a stack of menu cards.

"Will ye be needin' all them bills o' fare, Henri?" he asked. "They'd make elegant things to scale around in the crowd outside."

"Help yourself, m'sieur," the obliging Henri told him. "They are left over from last night's dinner in the hotel, and are of no further use."

Barney shoved them in his pocket, and started out with Pierre. A little later, a great big overgrown Irish boy, nearly thirty-five years old, was bobbing in and out among the dancers, pinning the menu cards on their coats and dresses.

"In appreciation of yer invaluable services," he told them, "I hereby confer upon ye the decoration of the Order of the Hungry Diner."

The decoration was always responded to with some appropriate little speech of acceptance, which could not be translated into English without making it feel homesick for the French language.

The dancing was soon abandoned in favor of a grand parade of the distinguished Order of the Hungry Diner, marching to the inspiring "Pr-r-rom-pom-pom-pom-pom" of a vocal volunteer band.

An elderly boulevardier, who had been studiously shuffling a pas seul in a secluded corner of the square, suddenly found himself the centre of a whirling circle of the members of the Order of the Hungry Diner. He made several attempts to gain his freedom, but they were always frustrated. Then, just as he was becoming resigned to his fate, a spirited confetti bombardment by a party of newcomers threw the Hungry Diners into disorder. In the wild confusion that followed, the veteran of the boulevards made his escape to the other side of the square, where he was able to resume his pas seul unmolested.

Barney, in the course of his evolutions hither and thither, noticed that he was being watched with considerable interest by three people in an open carriage on the Rue Halevy side of the square. He looked at them. Louis and the Vicomtesse d'Henriot occupied the seat. Facing them, all cramped up on the little shelf that lets down at the back of the driver, sat Mr. Rosenblatt.

Barney bowed. Louis and Rosenblatt immediately found something of interest on the other side of the carriage. The vicomtesse tried to look straight through him. But Barney was a very big man, and soon she, too, had to turn away to keep from seeing him. Barney drew freely on the idioms of two languages to express his feelings, and turned upon his heel.

A little later, he saw Pierre pass that way and lift his hat. The vicomtesse acknowledged his salutation with a smile. Barney straightway sought him out.

"So, ho, me terrible Peter!" cried Barney, greeting his friend with a resounding slap between the shoulders. "Ye're certainly a divil with the women. There's no denyin' it. Whose fair heart is it ye're after breakin', this time?"

Pierre looked pleased.

"Why, that is the Vicomtesse d'Henriot. She is with Louis. I thought you knew her."

"I have an idea thot I did meet her somewheres, but I can't be certain. Introduce me, will ye, Peter?"

Pierre would be delighted. Thrusting his arm through Barney's, he led him to the carriage.

"Madame la Vicomtesse d'Henriot," he said, with a sweeping bow, "permit me to present to you my very good friend M'sieur Bar-r-nee O'Bree-an."

The vicomtesse never so much as even glanced at Barney.

"I have already the honor of M'sieur O'Bree-an's acquaintance," she icily observed. Then, turning to Mr. Rosenblatt: "But as ye were about to remark, my dear baron?"

"I suspected thot she knew me, but I wasn't quite sure," Barney told Pierre very audibly. "But come along, Peter. The merry dance awaits us."

Pierre was greatly puzzled over the coldness of their reception, and told Barney so as soon as they were out of hearing.

"'Twas perfectly natural," Barney assured him. "'Tis a pity we didn't think of it before. They were afraid 'twould arouse suspicion if we were seen near the royal carriage. We ought to have been more dishcreet, Peter."

Pierre was soon drawn into the middle of the gayety again, but Barney, crestfallen at the rebuff he had just received, wandered over to Henri's in search of liquid solace. While he was standing at the bar, he was seized with a brilliant inspiration.

"Henri," he said, "if ye'll give me me football now, I think I'll be movin' along. I'm much obliged to ye for keepin' it for me."

Barney went out with the football under his arm, and sought the seclusion of a near-by doorway. With some difficulty he succeeded in squeezing one of Captain Hornblower's firecrackers part way into the hole through which the football was inflated.

"A most formidable lookin' infernal machine," he observed with satisfaction, as he surveyed the result of his labor at arm's length.

He tucked it under his coat, and hastened down the Rue Scribe, around back of the Opera House, and up the Rue Halevy on the other side. He crept stealthily up behind the carriage of the haughty vicomtesse. Crouching in the shadow, he struck a match and touched it to the fuse of his football bomb. The spark sizzled and spluttered. The time for vengeance had arrived. He tossed the football up over the back of the carriage and stepped aside.

"Bang!" went the firecracker.

"Une bombe!" cried Louis. Terror-stricken, he flung himself between the vicomtesse and the back of the seat.

Rosenblatt, with one blood-curdling shriek, leaped from the carriage and fled. It was only Barney's agility that saved him from being trampled upon by the American.

Louis' cry of *"Une bombe!"* spread through the crowd like wildfire.

"Une bombe!" people were shouting. *"Une bombe!" "Les anarchistes!" "A bas les anarchistes!"*

Even the horse wrinkled his skin a couple of times, and inquiringly cocked one ear.

A *sergent de ville* pushed his way through to the centre of the crowd.

"A bomb? The anarchists? Where?" he demanded in his most authoritative voice. "Ah!" as he spied the football in the bottom of the carriage. He picked it up gingerly. The crowd fell back a little.

"Why, what is this?" he asked in amazement.

"Voilà!"

To satisfy his suspicions he bounced the bomb upon the pavement a few times. It responded with all the elasticity of a common "rugbee" football.

"Be careful!" some one shouted warningly, and the crowd shrank back still farther.

Curiosity had at last gotten the better of Louis' terror, and he cautiously disengaged himself from his retreat behind the vicomtesse.

"You!" he gasped, with an agonized glance at the *sergent de ville*. It was the same hireling wretch who had penetrated the mystery of his purple beard.

"And you!" echoed the astonished policeman. "Ha! So it is you? At first, I thought you were but a little dolt, but now I know you, my fine Bluebeard. I have had my eye on you, in spite of all your baffling disguises. Come with me."

"He knows me," groaned Louis. Once more he would have taken refuge behind the vicomtesse, but that young lady had braced herself firmly against the back of the seat, and with a disdainful little shove, she pushed him over to his own side of the carriage.

"Sit up!" she contemptuously commanded.

In the meantime, Barney had elbowed his way to the scene of action.

"Save me," pleaded Louis, catching sight of him. "Save me, Bar-r-nee!"

Barney was already talking to the *sergent de ville* in low, earnest tones. "'Tis nothin' at all, M'sieur le Gendarme," he assured him confidentially. "'Twas only by way of a joke. I tossed the football into the carriage—ye can see for yerself 'tis nothin' but a football—an' some one yelled *'Une bomb!'* 'Twas thot thot started all the excitement."

"Very good. But that man there!" protested the policeman in a loud voice that strung beads of cold perspiration up and down Louis' spine. "I have seen that man before. He has been resorting to villainous disguises in order to evade the police. He is a dangerous criminal, who——"

"Whist, man, whist! Don't ye know who he is?" Barney tapped his forehead significantly. "He's a bit weak in the upper story; what ye call out uv his good senses. He thinks thot he's Louis, King uv France, an' thot the government's tryin' to assassinate him. Thot's why he's forever disguisin' himself."

"The poor fellow!" sympathized the *sergent de ville*. He gazed at Louis with that compassion which all French feel for the feeble-minded. "But if I do not arrest him, what assurance have I that he will not do himself injury?"

"He's perfectly harmless, an' thot's his nurse there with him. Besides, I'll take it upon meself to see thot he reaches home safely. An', by the way, M'sieur le Gendarme"—Barney lowered his voice to a whisper—"I almost forgot to tell ye. I found a ten-franc gold piece on the pavement just now. Somebody must have dropped it durin' the excitement. Perhaps ye can find the owner for it. But step down the Rue Halevy a bit. If I take it out here, they'll all be after claimin' it.

"Be aisy, Louis, it's all right," he sang out to that unhappy monarch, with a wave of the hand. "I'll be back in a minute. Wait for me."

When they were safely out of the crowd, Barney began to fumble in his pocket. "I thought it was a ten-franc piece," he said, drawing forth a handful of change. "But it seems to have been one five-franc piece, one two, an' three ones. It's losin' me mind entirely thot I am. But, anyhow, 'tis all the same thing, as long as ye find the owner."

The policeman assured Barney that he would do his best, and thanked him profusely on behalf of the owner. He seemed to have a clue that that unfortunate one had departed after discovering his loss, for his search did not lead him back to the Place de l'Opéra that evening.

When Barney returned to the square, the carriage was no longer the centre of attraction. For, in order to thoroughly enjoy the fourteenth of July, it is well not to pay too much attention to any one thing. Those who do, will miss something else. Most of the people, at that moment, were stampeding Henri's bar, where, much to Henri's discomfiture, an ingenious American had liberated a bunch of toy balloons, and was offering handsome cash prizes to any one who could get them off the ceiling.

Louis, his chin resting on his hands, was the picture of dejection. The vicomtesse had turned her back to him, and was gazing abstractedly at the crowd in front of Henri's.

"It's all right," Barney cheerfully sang out, as he approached the carriage. "I've fixed him."

Louis came to himself with a start.

"How can I ever show my gratitude, my dear Bar-r-nee?"

"Ye can't."

"But how did you manage it?" Louis asked eagerly. "What did you tell him?"

"I told him who ye were."

"You told him who I was! Bar-r-nee! Do you mean to say that all the time he has been in sympathy with the cause?"

"He expressed the deepest sort of sympathy for ye."

Louis could hardly believe his ears. But he was safe—that was the main thing. Suddenly, for the first time

since the throwing of the bomb, he noted the absence of Mr. Rosenblatt.

"The Baron de Rosenblatt?" he questioned anxiously. "Where is he? His train leaves at midnight for Havre. He must sail to-morrow morning for America."

"Never fear," replied Barney. "Judgin' from the last glimpse I got of him, he'll be in plenty uv time for his train."

The vicomtesse shifted her position slightly.

"Thank heavens you are safe, 'Toinette!" said Louis fervently.

"Quite safe, thank you." There was a trace of sarcasm in her voice. "And you, Louis? But I know that you were not hit, for I felt nothing pass through me. And now, Louis, good night. I will drive home alone."

"But I cannot permit such a thing," stammered Louis.

"I insist upon it. You have nothing more to fear," she added scornfully.

Louis would have protested further, but Barney took him by the arm, and gently but firmly assisted him to the ground. The Irishman, still holding the door open, doubtfully placed his foot upon the step.

"Yes, Bar-r-nee," the vicomtesse told him with a languid smile, "you may drive with me as far as my hotel if you wish it."

"'Toinette," Barney asked, as they were driving through the boulevard to the Rue Royale, "why have ye treated me the way ye have? What have I done to deserve it?"

"What have you done to deserve this treatment? Why do I permit you to drive home with me in preference to Louis? Because, my brave Bar-r-nee, you have saved my life. No, not that, for you were not there. But if you had been you would have saved it; is it not so?"

"But I thought ye were goin' to marry Louis?"

No answer.

"*Are* ye goin' to marry Louis?"

"When he becomes King of France —yes," she said, with a deep sigh.

"But, supposin' thot he never becomes King uv France?" persisted Barney.

For a moment she did not reply. Then, turning her head away, and speaking so softly that Barney had to lean very close to catch the words, she said: "Let us hope that he never will."

"He won't," said Barney with decision. "Trust me."

"Bar-r-nee!" she exclaimed, with a quick gesture of alarm. "You are going to do something dreadful. You must not."

"Trust me," repeated Barney.

They lapsed into silence. As they were turning from the Champs Elysées into the Rue la Boetie, the vicomtesse started to fix her veil, which led to a startling discovery.

"Bar-r-nee! You are holding my hand," she announced, with great severity.

"It won't be yours for long, mavourneen—not if Barney O'Brian can help it," he assured her in comforting tones.

"But you must stop it this instant!"

"An' why, colleen?"

"Because—er—the driver might see us," she feebly protested.

The driver could see nothing, but he heard something just then. The horse heard it, too; and, mistaking the meaning of the sound, he quickened his pace a trifle.

X.

Louis, bewildered by the unexpectedness of his dismissal by the vicomtesse, and Barney's sudden return to favor, stood watching them until their carriage was lost to sight around the corner.

Did she expect him to risk the future welfare of France merely to gratify a woman's whim? Bah! She was unstrung by the evening's excitement. When she came to her right senses, she would honor him for the caution he had shown. Caution? And here he was, standing unprotected and alone, on the very spot where, but an hour before, a dastardly attempt had been made upon his life. Trembling at the very thought of such foolhardiness, he

hurried toward the Boulevard Haussmann. Rosenblatt, he reflected—what terrible anxiety his friend must be feeling for the safety of his royal person! If he could only see Rosenblatt, just long enough to set his fears at rest, and to assure him that all was well. He glanced at his watch. It still lacked a quarter of an hour of midnight. Good! And there was a fiacre. He hailed it.

"Drive to the St. Lazare, *cocher,* and quickly," he urged. "I must catch the midnight train."

"We will be in time to catch two midnight trains," said the driver encouragingly.

Ten minutes later, they drew up in front of the station. Louis tossed a two-franc piece to the driver, and tore into the depot. After excited conversations with several railroad employees—their uniforms rather than their manner showed that they were not the owners of the road—Louis was admitted to the platform where the special for Havre lay, puffing and coughing, all ready to start.

He rushed up to one of the guards.

"My friend, M'sieur Rosenblatt——" he stammered breathlessly, "he leaves on this train. I must see him at once."

"Impossible," replied the guard wearily.

"But I tell you I must see him." Louis pressed a more tangible argument into the guard's palm. He began to take notice.

"Well, m'sieur, I will inquire. M'sieur Rosenblatt, you say?"

Louis heard the guard calling through the cars—they run American parlor cars on this train: "Rosenblatt? M'sieur Rosenblatt?"

Louis nervously paced the platform. Would he never find him? Finally, after what seemed twenty minutes, although it could not possibly have been more than three, the guard reappeared, smiling broadly.

"Well?" demanded Louis impatiently.

"Rosenblatt, you said, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes. What did he say?"

"No one in the train acknowledges the name. The only gentleman who looks in the least as though that might be his name disclaims it with particular vehemence. Besides, he says that even if his name were Rosenblatt he is an American citizen, and that he'll appeal to his government, and that he doesn't know anything about it, anyway. He expresses a perfect readiness, moreover, to swear that he knows nothing whatever about the persons that he was with, and never saw them before in all his life."

"But he mistakes me," protested Louis. "I am not of the police."

"I do not doubt it, m'sieur."

"Then you must go back and tell him that I am——"

The rest was cut short by the startling cry of *"En voiture! En voiture!"*

As the train puffed slowly out, Louis carefully scanned the car windows with the hope of yet catching a glimpse of his friend. His search was finally rewarded in a corner of the last window on the train. Two black, beady eyes peered anxiously out from a deathly white face. Louis waved his hand. Eyes and face vanished.

It was a very despondent little Louis that dragged his steps out of the St. Lazare station. But not for long. The spirits of a Frenchman have the buoyancy of cork. They are easily submerged, but the instant the pressure is removed they bob serenely to the surface again. When Louis reflected upon things as he wandered along in the cool night air he soon became optimistic again.

"It is not as though M'sieur Rosenblatt had refused to see *me,"* he reasoned. "He thought that it was some one of the police. And very naturally, too, for he is all upset. And who can blame him? For even I was worried for the moment when I heard that terrific report of the bomb.

"But what does it all matter? He will learn that I am safe, as soon as he reaches his home in North America, and then he will at once forward the remaining ninety-five thousand francs for the cause. For he is a man of his word. And, if proof of his loy-

alty were wanted, did he not just now deny all knowledge of me to the railroad guard, in order that I might not be compromised by his connection with the affair?"

What cause had he, Louis, for worry? Pooh! He briskly hummed a few bars of a little soldier song, and made martial sweeps with his cane at imaginary foes.

His humming came to an abrupt stop and his fingers tightened on the cane. The picture of Barney and the vicomtesse driving down the street together had flashed across his mind. The vicomtesse—driving with the Irishman! He ground his teeth in rage. But, had she not promised to become his wife as soon as he became King of France? His little heart swelled with joy. He understood. She was jealous of those affairs of state which occupied so much of his time. Did she think to punish him by going driving with that big Bar-r-nee O'Bree-an? Ha!

He smote the sidewalk sharply with his cane. A beggar, huddled in the corner of a doorway, awoke and rubbed his eyes. Louis tossed him a copper.

Bar-r-nee O'Bree-an? That reminded Louis. Bar-r-nee had saved him from arrest, that evening. True, it had turned out that the *sergent de ville* had been in sympathy with the cause all the time; but Bar-r-nee had not known that. He would show his gratitude to Bar-r-nee. How? He would confide in Bar-r-nee, and tell him of his coming ascent to the throne. In fact, now that Rosenblatt was gone, there was no reason why he should not confide in all his friends. He would give a splendid dinner to the whole Kings' Club, and announce his great good fortune. How envious they would all be—they, who had never taken him and his pretensions quite seriously. It was a grand idea.

Finding that he had unconsciously been walking in the direction of the Place de l'Opéra, Louis quickened his pace, in the hope that Barney might have returned and that he would find him there.

As soon as Barney had said good night to the vicomtesse, which seemed very much sooner to Barney than it did to the driver who was waiting for him, he went back to the Place de l'Opéra. He was anxious to find Pierre before Pierre should see Louis. There were certain things in connection with the bomb explosion that he felt Pierre should know. Just what those things were, he could tell better after he had seen Pierre.

By the time Barney reached the Place de l'Opéra, the crowd had sung the last Marseillaise and the band had departed. A few still unsatisfied merrymakers continued their dancing to the accompaniment of a hand organ.

In and out among the dancers, with body bent back and arms held high, his exalted majesty Pierre le Terrible was prancing through the steps of an American cakewalk.

"Peter!" cried Barney, with a whoop of joy.

The Irishman cleverly side-stepped an embrace of welcome.

"Bar-r-nee! Where have you been? I have been searching every place for you."

"An' I, Peter—I've been huntin' high an' low for you. Where did ye disappear to just after the terrible explosion?"

"I remembered your warning to be more discreet about approaching the royal carriage, Bar-r-nee. I therefore restrained myself to the outskirts of the crowd. And then when the police came—well, I increased my discretion accordingly. But, Bar-r-nee, they tell me that it was not a bomb at all; that it was only a rugbee football."

"A football?" Barney's astonishment was superb. But the reproachful gaze of Pierre's honest blue eyes proved too much for him. "Yes, yes, Peter," he stammered uneasily, "thot's what I wanted to see ye about. I wanted to explain it to ye before ye saw Louis."

"I should be pleased to listen—if you feel that you can trust me, of course."

"Tut, tut, man. Don't ye know me

better than thot?" asked Barney, placing his hand affectionately on Pierre's shoulder. "If I'd only had a chance to see ye before it happened—but it all came to me on the spur of the moment, an' honestly I didn't have time. It happened like this." The Irishman scratched his head to stir up his imaginative memory. "Ye remember the object of our secret mission, Peter? Well, it suddenly struck me thot we'd been simply wastin' our time. The people seemed all very well disposed toward the cause as far as we knew, but how were we to tell whether they were only shammin' or not? Were they only fair-weather friends? Would they stand by us in adversity? If we could only devise some way of layin' bare their inward feelin's. 'Twas then thot I conceived the brilliant idea of an attack on Louis' life. Thot would bring their true sentiments bubblin' to the surface. If they were for him, they'd hurl vile imprications on the head of his dastardly assassin; if, on the other hand, they were against him, the infuriated mob would tear him limb from limb. In thot case, there'd be no use in his tryin' for the throne, anyway."

"You are wonderful, Bar-r-nee," Pierre told him admiringly. Then a ray of suspicion crept into his mind. "But tell me, was it for that you seized the football this afternoon in the Bois?"

"Peter! Maybe ye also suspect thot I had a long-standin' engagement to be presented with firecrackers by Captain Hornblower this evenin'? Why, how was I to know?"

"Ah, then there really was an explosion! They laughed at me when I told them so. Hello! That looks like Louis." Pierre pointed over to the Rue Halevy. It was Louis.

They called to him, and waved their hands.

"Now, remember, Peter, not a word of what I've been tellin' ye," Barney cautioned him, as they crossed over to meet Louis. "He might not understand, an' 'twould only upset him."

Louis greeted his friends effusively.

"I thought I should find you here," he told Pierre. "I knew you could not leave until you had learned of the futility of that villainous attempt upon my life. I have returned to assure you of my safe escape. But I suppose that our friend Bar-r-nee here has told you all."

At that moment, Barney brought a great deal of pressure to bear upon Pierre's foot. Pierre was unable to suppress a groan. Louis mistook its cause.

"Take courage, Pierre. It is all over now," he said, with an attempt to make light of his awful experience. "But let us walk a little. I have good news for all of us."

They strolled leisurely up the Boulevard des Capucines.

"You must think it strange," said Louis to Barney, "that this man Rosenblatt and I have been together so much, of late."

"Not at all," Barney assured him. "Ye're both of ye very democratic."

Louis was listening mostly to himself, and the slur passed unnoticed.

"For why, do you think, have I permitted myself to be seen in his company? My friends, congratulate me. It has been a little game of diplomacy, and I have won. This Rosenblatt is going to furnish the funds to set me on the throne of France. He has already advanced me five thousand francs, and to-night he has left for America, to procure the remainder.

"But wait. That is not all. I tell this to you and Pierre because you two are my best friends. In order to share my joy with our royal brothers, I propose to give a dinner to the whole Kings' Club, in honor of the great event. The sooner the better. That is why I wanted to see you. Do you suppose that we could have it to-morrow night—to-night, I should say, for it is already to-morrow, now—in the royal *salle à manger* of Le Coq d'Argent? Could François prepare it in time? And could we get word to all the different sovereigns before then? Do you know where they all live?"

"I could easily find out where they live from François," said Barney, "even Alexander Petrovitch, although I could

manage to lose his address with any kind of encouragement."

"No, no; we must have them all. Even Alexander. Then I can leave it to you, Bar-r-nee—to you and to Pierre? You have my carte blanche. Make it for eight o'clock. I will drop around for *déjeuner* about noon, and see how you are coming along."

XI.

Bright and early in the morning, Barney was bent over the desk of Le Coq d'Argent, dashing off invitations to the various members of the Kings' Club for a grand banquet of state to be held that evening by his most Christian majesty, Louis XXI, of France.

Louis arrived promptly at noon. François was at his side in an instant, bowing and scraping and offering his most heartfelt felicitations. His majesty thanked him graciously.

"And M'sieur O'Bree-an? He has made all the necessary arrangements?"

"Most assuredly, your highness. He is inside, now."

Louis went in. After a cordial greeting, in which he noted with satisfaction that Barney called him "Sire," the two fell to discussing the plans for the evening.

"And, oh, Bar-r-nee, the cost of the dinner? It will not run over three hundred francs, I suppose?"

Barney was not sure. François was called and appealed to.

"No-o," agreed the boniface rather doubtfully. "The dinner itself will not exceed three hundred francs. But, of course, with the two extra cases of wine, which I am holding in reserve for——"

"But that is only to be held in reserve," interrupted Louis. "If we do not use it, we do not have to pay for it."

Louis took his notebook from his pocket, and began to figure out just where he stood.

Of the five thousand francs that Mr. Rosenblatt had given him, four hundred and fifty had already been expended for clothes. Then the three hundred francs for the dinner that night would make a total of seven hundred and fifty francs spent, leaving him four thousand two hundred and fifty francs with which to draft his regiment. After careful consideration of each item, he jotted the following army budget down in his notebook:

	FRANCS.
800 privates at 4 francs	3,200
40 corporals at 5 francs	200
20 sergeants at 6 francs	120
20 lieutenants at 10 francs	200
10 capitaines at 20 francs	200
2 chefs de bataillon at 50 francs	100
1 colonel at 100 francs	100
Total	4,120

That would leave one hundred and thirty francs for the colonel's uniform. He, himself, would be colonel—colonel with the rank of a Maréchal de France—and, just to show his devotion to the cause, he would forego the colonel's recompense.

"There, that is all settled," he congratulated himself, as he pocketed his notebook, and got up from the table.

Shortly before eight, that evening, the invited monarchs began to straggle up the back stairs. As each one entered the door of the royal *salle à manger,* he stopped, speechless with admiration for the elaborate floral decorations, the little colored candles that twinkled from every available corner, and, especially, the huge crown of immortelles that graced the centre of the table. Glances of inquiry directed at the other monarchs elicited only shrugs.

Promptly on the stroke of eight, if there had been any clock to strike it, Louis, flanked by Pierre le Terrible and Barney O'Brian, majestically entered.

"If your exalted majesties will assume your respective thrones——" he suggested, with a gracious wave of the hand.

Louis had intended to withhold the occasion of the feast from his guests until near the end, but the atmosphere of polite expectation that pervaded the table was too much for him. At the first change of dishes, he arose.

"Your assembled highnesses," Louis

began, in a quavering voice, "I owe you an explanation of why I have brought you here this evening. My brothers, I have great news for you; news of good fortune for me, and through me good fortune for France —good fortune for the whole world." His nervousness had gone; his voice was the voice of a mighty ruler proclaiming victory. "Brothers of the purple, I ask you to rejoice with me at my acquisition to the crown."

The expected burst of applause failed to materialize. To tell the truth, they were envious. For kings are as jealous as actors, and, like actors out of a job, kings out of a throne are particularly jealous.

Louis then told of Rosenblatt, the Shee-ca-go Crœsus, and of the subtle diplomacy he had brought to bear upon him. He launched into a glowing description of the final capture of Rosenblatt's millions and of the owner's departure for North America to gain access to his overflowing coffers.

But even this failed to arouse the royal enthusiasm, and Louis, very much disappointed, sat down.

Barney O'Brian jumped into the threatening breach with a glass of champagne.

"A health to King Louis!" he cried. *"Vive le roi!"*

The monarchs were on their feet in an instant. They drained their glasses.

Louis thanked them in a few well-chosen words, and assured them, one and all, that they might, collectively and individually, count upon the aid of France in time of need. This offer met with real applause. It broke the ice for a long interchange of offensive and defensive alliances between the nations represented.

By the time the cigars were lighted, it seemed as if everything that possibly could be drunk to had been drunk to. But Barney bade François fill the glasses once more; M'sieur Paliole, he thought, had still a toast to propose. François started to say something, but the Irishman cut him short with a peremptory "Fill the glasses."

When the glasses were filled, Alphonse Paliole, in response to a whispered suggestion from Barney, charged the company drain their cups in honor of the brave men who were to lift Louis to the throne of France—his gallant army!

"Vive l'armée!"

They downed it with a will.

The conscientious François, as soon as they had resumed their seats, sought Louis' ear for a moment. His majesty would pardon the interruption, but something had been said about limiting the cost of the dinner, and he merely wished his majesty to understand that for this last toast it had been necessary to draw upon the extra supply of wine. Of course——

"What! How much?"

His majesty whisked out his notebook and pencil, and began figuring desperately.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, Louis brought his fist down on the table with a force that made the dishes dance.

"Stop!" he cried. "Stop it! You have drunk up one of my captains!"

The monarchs stared at each other in blank amazement. Had his good fortune turned his mind?

"You have drunk up the pay of one of my captains," wailed Louis, more explicitly.

A great light dawned upon the company. A long-drawn-out sigh of relief went around the table.

Barney raised his glass solemnly.

"Then, a health to his memory, gentlemen. A health to the poor, lost captain."

"A health!" *"Le capitaine!"*

"But you will only be drinking up more of my soldiers," Louis angrily protested.

"Tut, Louis, tut!" soothed Barney. "Of what use is any company of soldiers without their captain to lead them? How could they better show their devotion than by followin' their leader even in death? If 'twas any other kind of a company, they'd be unworthy of the cause. Come, gentlemen: a company to their brave captain!"

"Bravo! Bravo! A company to the brave *capitaine!*"

A rapid bombardment of corks, a sharp hissing of gas, and they were drinking "a company to the memory of its brave *capitaine.*"

"And now, my royal brothers," said Pierre, "before we part, let us fill our glasses with the highest rank in the whole regiment, and drink to our royal host. A colonel, gentlemen—a colonel, to the health of King Louis XXI, of France!"

"But I am the colonel," Louis wearily objected.

"So much the better," Petrovitch assured him, as he took the last bottle from the dumbwaiter. "A colonel to the colonel! We will drink you *to* you *with* you."

The fire of victory shone in Barney's eyes.

"Up!" he urged, himself leaping to his chair. "Up on yer thrones, everybody! A colonel to the colonel! Touch glasses! Drink!"

XII.

Shortly after noon of the day following the rout of Louis' paper soldiers at Le Coq d'Argent, Barney O'Brian and the Vicomtesse Antoinette d'Henriot were seated at the table behind the portière in Henri's bar. The Irishman was drawing a glowing word picture of his sweeping victory of the night before.

"'Twas a glorious fight," he said with relish. "On the one side, Louis an' his French revolutionists; on the other, Barney O'Brian an' Ireland, together with the allied forces of Lugania, Jerusalem, Seravia, the Byzantine Empire, an' the saints know what not! The fightin' had scarcely begun before we downed one of Louis' captains, an' at the first general assault we surrounded his soldiers an' got away with a whole company of them. They were wiped out as completely as if they'd been swallowed up.

"I don't know how many they left on the field. I wasn't there when François gathered up the dead soldiers. On our side, there wasn't a scratch, savin' poor Peter the Terrible, who complained of a slight feelin' of injury in the head, early this mornin'."

"Then you did not drink it all yourself," said the vicomtesse, with a sigh of relief.

"'Twasn't necessary. But I gladly would have, 'Toinette—thot an' more for your sake, mavourneen."

The vicomtesse looked at him reproachfully. Her hand, small and white, was resting on the table. Barney covered it with his big, brown hand.

"Tell me, 'Toinette," he asked her gently, "are ye sure ye feel no regrets? Even though ye might have been a queen?"

"None, my big Bar-r-nee man. And who can tell?" she added, with a little laugh. "Perhaps I may yet be queen—Queen of Ireland."

Louis waited a reasonable length of time for the promised ninety-five thousand francs, but in vain. He then wrote to "M. Rosenblatt, Chicago, N. Amerique."

The letter was returned, unopened, and Louis was obliged to admit that he had no immediate prospects on which to hold the vicomtesse to her promise to marry the King of France. Moreover, he generously gave his unofficial sanction to her marriage with Barney by attending the wedding, for Louis had one of those romantic temperaments that treasure their misfortunes, and find real pleasure in their imagined unhappinesses.

He is a barber, now, and a master of his art in all its branches. But it is when applying dye to the beard or mustache that he is at his best. 'Tis then that his eyes take on that dreamy, faraway look of your true artist. Phantom lords float out of their air castles to pay him homage; ghostly spies, accused of penetrating royal disguises, are brought before him for sentence—at this point he always applies an extra coat of the dye—and rainbow-clad armies joyously proclaim him king. For Louis still has hopes.

A Chat With You

THERE is one story in the present number of the magazine upon which we would like your opinion. It is "The King's Club," by Robert Rudd Whiting, the complete novel with which the magazine closes. Mr. Whiting is a new writer. This is the first story of his that we have ever published. We have high hopes for his future, and as this tale of his, with its whimsical humor, is decidedly out of the ordinary we want to hear from you about it. Of course you have read it, for, as we have said before, we know that you go through the magazine pretty carefully before you turn to this little "chat" of ours.

THE present number contains the first big installment of Ralph D. Paine's new serial, "The Fugitive Freshman." You remember, of course, the last novel of his, "The Head Coach," and how well you liked it. Scribner's will bring it out in book form in the spring at $1.50. We hope that you are going to like "The Fugitive Freshman" just as well. Please turn back and note the length of the installment we are giving you, remembering, if you want to know how many words it represents, that a printed page of THE POPULAR runs somewhere in the neighborhood of eight hundred words as an average. There will be three installments of "The Fugitive Freshman," another two weeks from this, and a third final one a month from this. In just about a month you'll have read the whole complete novel, which is much too long to print complete in any one edition of any magazine in the world. That illustrates the advantages of our twice-a-month plan. Don't you think that it is working well, and that your expectations in regard to it were justified?

ONE thing more we want to say about Ralph D. Paine. We don't talk so much about his stories simply because they are interesting and entertaining. They reflect strongly an impulse toward manliness, toward clean living and clean thinking, hard working and hard hitting that THE POPULAR stands for more than anything else—except, of course, the publication of the best fiction in the world. If you have any friends who think that the influence of college life and athletics is for the bad, that the strenuous life arouses the brutality rather than the manliness and Christian spirit in a boy, get him to read some of Paine's stories. There are such people, too many of them, in fact, and the sooner we convert them to our way of thinking, the better.

YOU have the second installment of Roman Doubleday's serial, "The Red House on Rowan Street," in the present number. You know for yourself how good a mystery story it is. It runs for two more installments, one two weeks hence in the magazine that appears on the stands on the twenty-fifth of this month; the other a month from now in the magazine you will purchase the tenth of January. We hope that you will all remember the dates and pass the word along. Look for THE POPULAR always on the twenty-fifth of the month as well as on the tenth. And if you want any back numbers ask your newsdealer for them. We are making a special effort to prevent any of our readers missing a number through inadvertence. They have been selling so much faster than we had expected that

we have been hard pressed sometimes to supply the back numbers. But from now on we are making special arrangements to do so.

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A LITTLE while ago we said something about Alfred Henry Lewis. If you remember, he wrote "Wolfville Days," "The Boss," "The Sunset Trail," and some other things that blazed a new wide trail in the fiction world. It is hard to forget anything that Lewis writes. He has a fashion of expressing himself different from that of any one else. His words and phrases have a grip and intensity to them. You couldn't fall asleep while reading anything he had written. We promised that you would read his latest work in THE POPULAR, and you will get the first of his stories in the January month-end issue. It appears on the stands December 25—in two weeks. The story is called "The Philosophy of Danny Nugent," and we don't want you to miss it. That's one reason why we remind you of the date so frequently.

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THE complete novel in the issue of THE POPULAR for a fortnight hence is by Bertrand W. Sinclair. You remember, of course, "The Land of Frozen Suns." We think that Sinclair's work is improving all the time. His newest novel, "Piano Jim," is laid in the West, and is worth reading more than once. We think you won't stop till you read it through, once you start it. We wish we still had that pleasure before us, for we enjoyed it very much when we read it in manuscript.

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WALTER CAMP—you have heard of him. He is the best known writer on athletics in America, and to a certain extent he might be called the father of American rugby football. He certainly has had more to do with the development of the game than any one man now living. He has written for THE POPULAR a story of college rowing, "Bulldog Brown." You will like it when you read it. It will appear a month hence in the first February edition. There will also be a story in the same number, "Pincus' Philosophy," by Max Marcin, a writer who is comparatively new to the pages of THE POPULAR. You will hear more about Marcin later. We just mention him here because we want you to watch his work.

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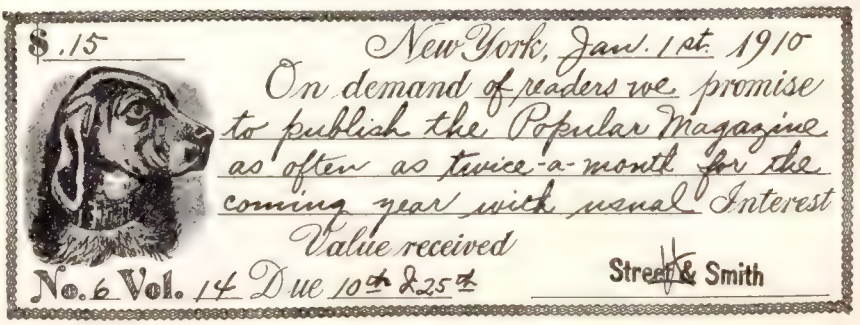
JUST notice the little promissory note that runs across the bottom of this page. It means that we are still hunting hard for the right material to make two POPULARS grow where one grew before, and that we are still anxious to do what you have asked us to do so often. You remember that we said that we would bring four of the best numbers of THE POPULAR ever issued during the months of January and February. We are going to keep that promise to the letter. The number in your hand to-day is the first installment, and in two weeks there will be another just as big and just as good.



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But oh! what they missed
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conception of a food so good as

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UP FROM

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N. Girard, Pa.

When I enrolled I was an instrument man in the service of the St. Louis Terminal R. R. I have been in the Civil Engineering Department of the Mo. Pac. Ry. Co. for the greater portion of the past six years and am now Assistant Engineer of same. When I applied for a position with this road, I showed my I. C. S. Certificate and, after a perusal of same, the representative of the Company said to me: "I guess you will do all right. When can you report for duty?"
(Signed) W. H. MOORE,
404 14th St., Alexandria, La.

At the time I enrolled in your School of Mines, I was loading coal in a mine, but before I had more than half completed the Course, the position of Mine Electrician and Mine Boss was given me on account of my knowledge of electricity and electrical machinery that I received from the Schools. Just as I was completing the Course I was given the position of Mine Foreman.

My salary has been increased, the enjoyment of living has been doubled on account of the mental training I received from my Course, to say nothing about the facts learned about the Science of Mining. (Signed) H. W. MERRIMAN,
Dell Roy, Ohio.

At the time of my enrollment I was employed as dry goods clerk on a small salary; am now holding a position as a Licensed Stationary Engineer in the Wabash R. R. Shops at this place. I feel it is the best money I ever invested, and have spoken many good words for the I. C. S.
(Signed) CHARLES HAGERTY,
Montpelier, Ohio.

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I enrolled for the Complete Steam Engineering Course while a fireman in a stationary plant. Two months after my enrolment in the Schools, I was advanced to chief fireman, and one year later accepted a position as Assistant Engineer with the Toronto Water Works. I held that for five years and made application for my present position, that of Chief Engineer for the City of Toronto, which I received after a competitive examination, there being seventy-two applicants. I received 97 per cent on same. I was the only Scranton School Student in the lot. I have been able to increase my salary 300 per cent. since my enrolment.

(Signed) JAMES BANNAN,
69 Tecumseth St., Toronto, Canada.

I have found the Complete Architectural Course of great value to me, although not having completed the Course. When I enrolled I was a carpenter earning $1.50 a day. My earning capacity has been greatly increased and my work is easier, and the best of all, *I am practically my own boss.* I am now Supervising Architect of the New Courthouse Building at Peru, Ind., and have full control of the work. The building will cost $300,000. Besides this I am doing other work in the designing and planning of buildings.

(Signed) H. P. FIKE,
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These makers are equally famous. Both have made watches for 40 years or more. Both have attained a vast reputation by placing American watches in the lead of the world.

There is no choice in these makes, as every watch expert knows. One is as good as the other. They are the two thinnest, handsomest, most popular watches made. The only great difference lies here:

One Fixes Prices

One of these makers fixes the retail price. Every dealer must agree not to undersell a certain fixed minimum. This is done to insure such a generous profit that dealers will favor this watch.

The other maker sells some watches to us close to the cost of making. We get them under the name "King Landis," but they are exactly the same as when sold under the regular name.

We are permitted on these watches to divide our profits with you. But we are not permitted to interfere with dealers by advertising the maker's name.

Only 1,000 Watches

We are able to obtain only 1,000 of these popular thin model watches. There is no possibility of obtaining more until the middle of the coming year.

We can get so few of these watches that we don't even catalog them. We are going to sell them to the first thousand who apply for them, simply as an advertisement. Orders will be filled in rotation. When the thousand are gone not another watch of this class can be had for fully eight months to come.

Eight Months Credit—30 Days' Trial

We shall sell these watches on credit exactly the same as for cash, as we do that on everything. We allow you to give them away as Christmas presents—no restrictions whatever.

The first payment is only $3.50—send that with your order. The balance may be paid $2.75 per month, giving you 8 months to pay. The watch will be sent on approval. You may have 30 days' trial before even deciding to keep it. If you don't find the watch and the price saving exactly as we represent, you may return the watch to us and we will return your first payment. You are under no obligations whatever.

Fixed Price, $30—Our Price, $23.50

We will sell you the 17-jewel thin model King Landis for $23.50. Terms, $3.50 down and $2.75 per month.

The watch is open face, with white enamel dial, or we will furnish at same price a 24k gold plated dial with black Arabic figures—the popular dial shown in picture at top.

The case is gold-filled, Louis XIV French pattern, with pendant and bow. The bow is of solid gold, as are also the joints and pins. The finish is plain and bright—the regular Bassene model.

The case is dust proof, and made by a celebrated maker whose name for nearly half a century has stood for perfection. It is stamped on the inside—"King Landis, guaranteed for 25 years." The movement in each watch is regulated in each case.

We will put your monogram on the back in De Luxe style—either script or ribbon—for 75c extra.

This price of $23.50 is for the 17-jewel thin model watch complete. Any dealer who sells a Trust watch of same style, whether by mail or in stores, must charge at least $30. This is the fixed minimum retail price for the same grade of watch in the same style of case. We save you $6.50 under this minimum price, yet we let you pay a little each month,

But we have only 1,000 thin model watches and they will go to those who order first. We positively cannot get more of them.

Send at Once for Christmas Catalog!

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We also issue a Watch and Jewelry catalog showing 1,200 articles in watches, diamonds and jewelry, all of which are sold as low as our watches, and all are sold on credit. Articles bought on credit may be given as Christmas gifts. We will mail this complete catalog free if you ask.

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AGENTS WANTED in every county to sell the Transparent Handle Pocket Knife. Big commission paid. From $75 to $300 a month can be made. Write for terms. Novelty Cutlery Co., No. 14 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

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AGENTS, Male and Female, can make from $10 to $15 a day selling my Ostrich feather and Willow Plumes; big money for you. Same has never been canvassed. For particulars write Joseph Gluck, 621 Broadway, N. Y.

AGENTS—$5 daily selling our handy Tool, 12 articles in one. Lightning seller. Sample free. Thomas Mfg. Co., 460 Third St., Dayton, Ohio.

BE YOUR OWN BOSS:—Start Mail Order business at home; devote whole or spare time. We tell you how. Very good profit. Everything furnished. No Catalog outfit proposition. Write at once for our "Starter" and free particulars. Address, M. L. Krueger Co., 155 Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

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Agents and Help Wanted—Continued.

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AGENTS. Portraits 35c. Frames 15c, sheet pictures 1c, stereoscopes 25c, views 1c. 30 days credit. Samples & Catalog Free. Consolidated Portrait Dept. 1148, 1027 W. Adams St., Chicago.

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$2.40 Per 100 Instead of $5.00

MORTON R. EDWIN PANATELA

is by all standards of comparison a 10c. cigar. It will satisfy the most cranky smoker of imported brands. It is fully 5½ in. long, strictly hand made, of choicest Havana tobocco—genuine Sumatra wrapper. It smokes freely and evenly—never chars down the side, but keeps burning coolly and fragrantly to the last toothhold.

The reason this cigar is sold at $2.40 instead of $5.00 per hundred is because I buy and sell for cash. I ask no credit, neither do I give it. I personally buy my tobacco direct from the grower in Cuba and pay him at least five weeks before the tobacco reaches the U. S. Custom House. I buy for less and sell for less. The man who buys and sells on credit cannot compete with me. I believe in what Elbert Hubbard said in April, 1907, issue of the *Philistine:*

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>
> "All the losses of the merchants who give credit are made good by the people who pay."
>
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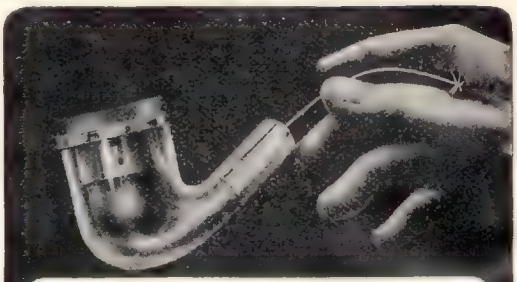

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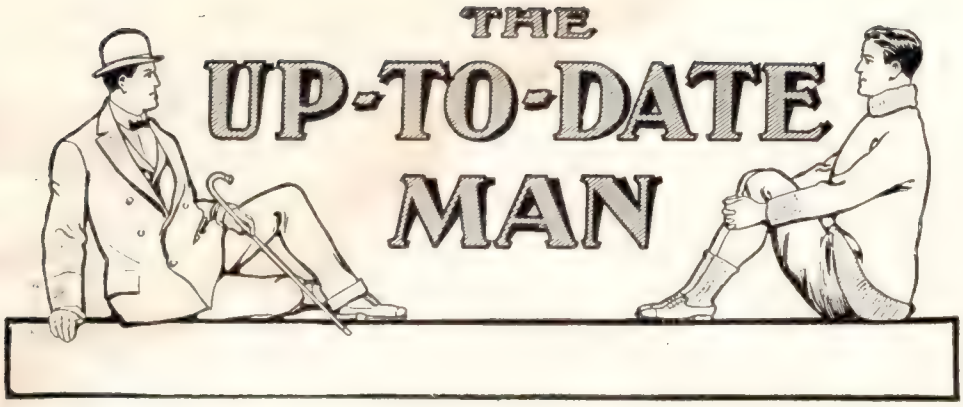
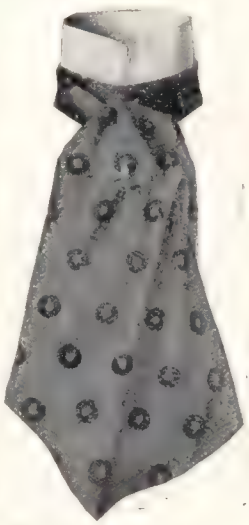


PLAIDS and checks are shouldering aside the familiar stripes in sack suits. The new English checks are bold, to be sure; but they express the desire of most men to infuse life and color into their all too sombre dress. Another manifestation of the mode are heavy striped flannels, woven thick so as to adapt them to winter wear. Heretofore, flannels have been regarded as unmistakably hot-weather stuffs. These heavy flannels have the usual patch pockets, soft lapels, and turned-up trousers, and are really ideal for early morning lounging. By the by, brown is "coming in" as the ultra-fashionable color, while green has been virtually dropped.

The marked preference of gray in lounge suits has fanned into favor the long-budding vogue for gray frock suits. These, hitherto associated with coaching and indoor meets of ceremony, are now being also worn for promenade. Indeed, one of the best Fifth Avenue tailors is cutting many gray frocks. This costume is far more becoming to most men than the conventional black frock, having a sprightlier, more young-mannish air. A gay boutonnière lends an added dash of jauntiness. White waistcoats, snuff-brown ascots, and gloves of a shade known as "mode," complete a very "chic" outfit.

Knitted mufflers are the "smart" neck wrap this season. Besides white, black, and pearl, they are shown in very fetching black-and-white mixtures with fringed ends. The old-fashioned "protectors" and "shields" were never in good form, looking stiff and provincial. Of course, the large, white silk handkerchief, folded lengthwise, is yet in vogue, though black is not used. The high military collar on the fashionable evening waistcoat renders a muffler indispensable to guard the linen collar from dust and soil. Mufflers with any claim to style must be loose and free. All the stitched and pressed forms are too precise and machine-made to suit the present-day leaning toward ease and simplicity in every detail of evening dress.

Men of fashion congregate every year at the New York Horse Show. There one sees the elegant dawdler at his ease. It is the best place to judge the modes, both formative and adopted. Evening dress coats show a tendency toward outside breast pockets. One must carry the handkerchief in a convenient place, and tucking it up the coat cuffs does not commend itself to Americans. Silk hats are again very belled of crown and curled of brim. White buck gloves were noticed everywhere. So, too, were ornate waistcoat buttons and shirt studs to match. Walking sticks, held high between the wearer's elbow and side, had plain ball caps, instead of crooks. The foreigners from the embassies were partial to the monocle. Pumps outnumbered high shoes. White silk watch ribbons, adorned with an oval gold buckle,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were uncommon and quite "smart."

Gray frock and morning coats — semi-frocks — both braided and braidless, shared approval with the black cutaway. Only a few conventional black frocks were observed, and these were worn by older men, not by the youngsters and "fadsters." Buttoned boots with gray cloth uppers seem to have returned. Sticks were carried to match the color of the suits, an agreeable innovation. White waistcoat edging was omnipresent. The ever-recurring rumor that the "ascot is going out" was belied by its vogue on the promenade. Boutonnières decorated most coats as the needed finishing touch to correct afternoon dress.

A Becoming Riding "Stock."

It is preëminently a "brown season" in lounge suits. The Horse Show established that fact beyond cavil. The deep, rich browns are again fashionable alike in suitings, overcoatings, scarfs, waistcoats, and the other accessories. Next to brown, but distinctly less "smart," is gray. Then follow blue and black-and-white. Checks and plaids are newer and rarer than the done-to-death stripes. Sack coats are cut with higher lapels, some fastening with a single centre button, an idea borrowed from Regent Street and the Rue de la Paix.

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Fancy soft hat ribbons have lost none of their popularity. They are not only made in all the college, fraternity, club, and regimental colors, but even in special stripes and shades to match suits and scarfs. Some of them are the usual width—others are broad enough to cover the whole crown of the hat, a "young-mannish" touch.

Knitted four-in-hands are still in fashion, despite predictions that they would not survive last summer's craze. They are narrow and knotted snugly under a fold collar. Solid colors and bright-hued stripes share approval. The regular summer four-in-hand is still slim of knot, but with a tendency toward a broader apron—"loose-end scarfs," as they are sometimes called. Bow ties are adjusted with tight centres and soft, spread-out ends. Sometimes the scarf and handkerchief is made of the same material, thereby lending a pleasing uniformity to the details of summer dress. Gray, green, purple, and blue are the most favored scarf colors, with a host of in-between tints. The patterns may be brilliant stripes or delicate leaf and vine traceries of a hundred and one sorts.

Fashion is throwing off the shackles of tradition. Intelligent men are coming to recognize that style is flexible, and that while a mode may be well suited to one man, it may be totally unsuited to another.

Ten years ago, King Edward of England—then the Prince of Wales—was able to make almost any eccentricity the fashion by merely wearing it. Today the royal stamp of approval on green hats, or the manner of trimming the beard creates a ripple of—amusement. Times have changed, styles have changed, men have changed.

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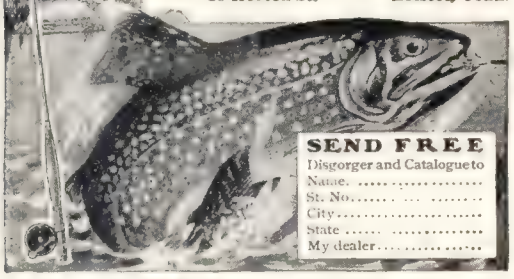

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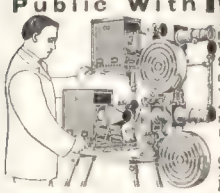

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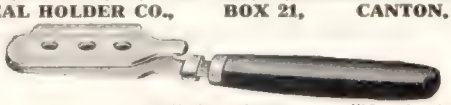

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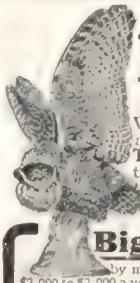

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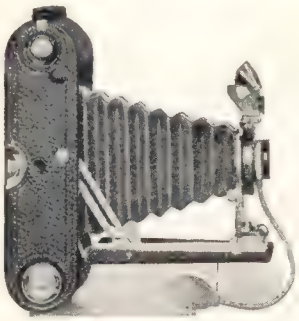

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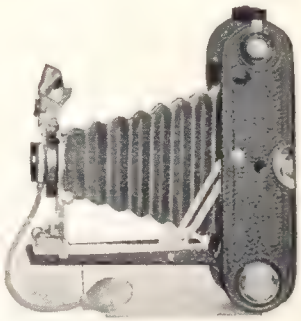

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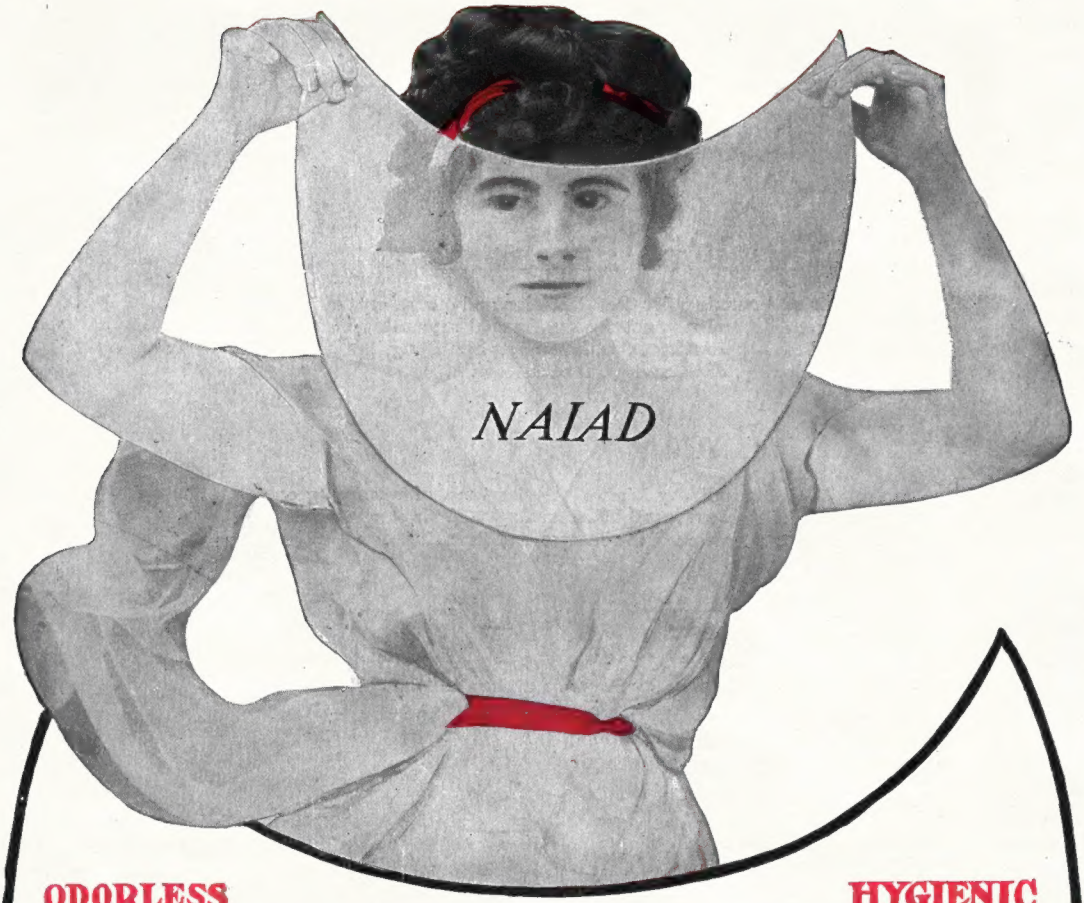

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